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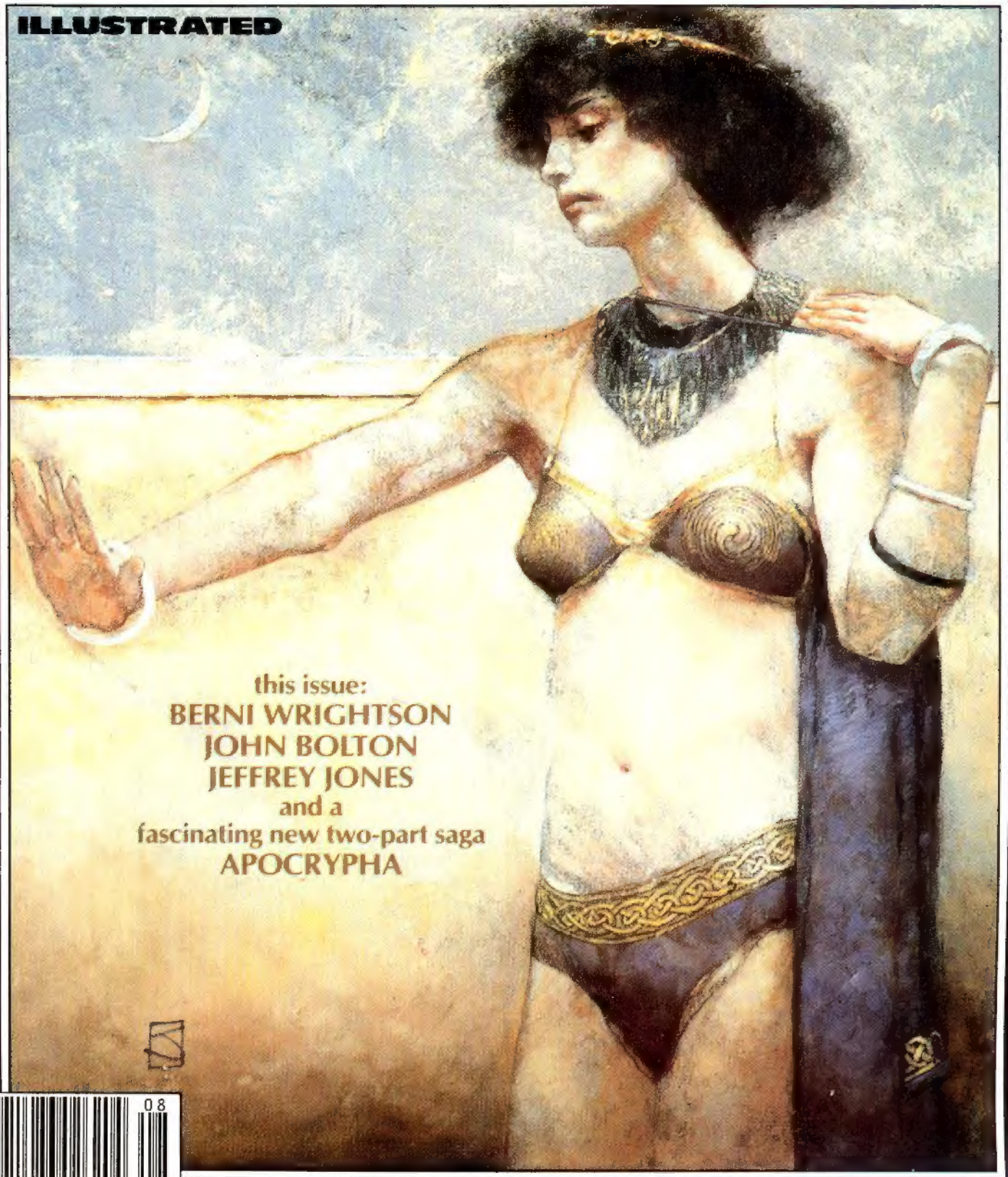

this issue:
BERNI WRIGHTSON
JOHN BOLTON
JEFFREY JONES
and a
fascinating new two-part saga
APOCRYPHA

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THE SACRED & THE PROFANE

IF IT IS POSSIBLE THAT WE TRIUMPH OVER THE CRUELTY OF OUR DISASTER, THEN A MIRACLE MUST BE IMMINENT. OUR PLIGHT IS THAT ELEMENTARY. IT IS, IN FACT, THE ONLY DELIVERANCE WE CAN PRAY FOR. WHATEVER FORM IT TAKES ON WILL BE EXTREME. WHERE WILL WE FIND THE SHADOWED MEMORY OF COURAGE TO ACCEPT THAT MIRACLE? IT WILL BE FRIGHTENING— PERHAPS TOO FRIGHTENING TO RECOGNIZE.

§ HOW WE HAVE COME TO SUCH A STATE IS EVEN MORE FRIGHTENING— AND SHAMEFUL. I AM NOT SURE THAT ERIC IS WRONG WHEN HE SAYS WE HAVE BECOME JUST AS DANGEROUS AS THE BEASTS THAT LURK WITHIN THE SHADOWS.

§ EACH OF US COWER IN OUR OWN FASHION. YET THIS NEWLY FOUND HUMILITY SEEMS TO CONTRADICT THE VERY PURPOSE OF ST. CATHERINES MISSION. WAS IT, PERHAPS, HUMAN ARROGANCE THAT DROVE US INTO SPACE, RATHER THAN DIVINE INSPIRATION? THE UNIVERSE SEEMS MUCH TOO SMALL TO PROTECT A VESSEL AS IMMENSE AS OURS.

§ WHAT HAS OCCURRED I CAN NEITHER FORGET NOR COMMUNICATE. I FEEL VERY LOST. BISHOP BROCK, JOHN MILLS, AND DR. WHITING NOW AMONG THE NUMEROUS FATALITIES, I LOOK EVEN MORE DESPERATELY TO BROTHER JOSHUA. UNFORTUNATELY MY FAITH IN HIM GOES UNREWARDED AND UNSEEN.

§ I HAVE RECENTLY GAINED SOME SEMBLANCE OF COMPOSURE. THE ORDEAL IN THE CLINIC LEFT ME EXHAUSTED AND VERY NEAR A QUIET SORT OF HYSTERIA. I THREW MYSELF INTO A DEEP SLEEP AND FOUND MYSELF DREAMING OF THE TIMES ON EARTH THOSE SIX LONG YEARS AGO. TIMES WHEN ST. CATHERINES MISSION WAS BEING PREPARED.

By *Dean Motter and Ken Steacy*

A STAR + REACH PRODUCTION

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MEMORIA
CHAPTER VI

Vessels of the Past

2043 AD HAD BEEN A MOST SIGNIFICANT YEAR FOR THE GLOBAL COMMUNITY. JANUARY HAD SEEN THE MOST INCREDIBLE EVENT OF THE CENTURY: THE FIRST EVIDENCE OF INTELLIGENT LIFE AMONG THE STARS. I HAD NEVER REALLY UNDERSTOOD THE DETAILS OF THAT EVIDENCE. THOUGH I RECALL IT HAD TO DO WITH COMPLEX MATHEMATICAL AND GEOMETRIC PATTERNS RECEIVED BY THE RADIO TELESCOPE IN BRAZIL. APPARENTLY THESE SIGNALS ORIGINATED FROM WITHIN THE M-31 GALAXY, ANDROMEDA.

§ THE NEWS OF THIS CONTACT HAD A MOST REMARKABLE EFFECT ON MANKIND. THE CHURCH, PARTICULARLY THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH, WHOSE CONGREGATION HAD BEEN WANING STEADILY SINCE THE TURN OF THE CENTURY SUDDENLY ENJOYED A FERVENTLY RENEWED POPULARITY. I REMEMBER CARDINAL MAUNROT ONCE REMARKING THAT THE CATHOLIC POPULATION HAD RISEN TO NEARLY FIVE-FOLD THAT OF ITS GREATEST NUMBER IN HISTORY.

§ THE PRESENCE OF A SACRED MYSTERY HAD ONCE MORE, IT SEEMS, TURNED HEARTS AND MINDS HEAVENWARD. IT WAS A TIME OF GREAT COMMUNITY AND LOVE.

§ ONE OF THE CHAMPIONS OF THE INTERSTELLAR MIRACLE WAS AN ICONOCLASTIC YOUNG ARCH BISHOP FROM BOSTON BY THE NAME OF EVAN FRANKLIN. HE TOOK IT UPON HIMSELF TO TRAVEL AROUND THE WORLD PREACHING THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE ANDROMEDA SIGNALS. I CAN REMEMBER SEEING ARCH BISHOP FRANKLIN IN THE MEDIA QUITE OFTEN THAT YEAR. HE WAS A MAN OF GREAT CONVICTION AND ELOQUENCE. HIS SERMONS WERE SAID TO SHIMMER WITH INSPIRATION AND GLORY.

§ THE SUMMER OF THAT SAME YEAR BROUGHT ABOUT THE VIRTUAL COLLAPSE OF THE ENTIRE WORLD ECONOMIC SYSTEM. DISPUTE AMONG THE THIRD WORLD COUNTRIES ERUPTED WITH MORE FREQUENCY AND FEROCITY THAN EVER BEFORE. THE EUROPEAN AND WESTERN WORLDS STRUGGLED THROUGH THE MOST SEVERE DEPRESSION IN THEIR HISTORY. FAITH AND HOPE BECOME EVEN MORE PRECIOUS AND OUR RANKS SWELLED TO EVEN GREATER NUMBERS.

WE JUST DON'T HAVE THE POWER TO CONTINUE EXCAVATING, YOUR EMINENCE. WE'RE TAPPING INTO THE LIFE SUPPORT MAINS NOW.
AT THIS RATE OF CONSUMPTION WE WILL BE STONE COLD IN TWENTY-FOUR HOURS.

VERY WELL, CLOSE DOWN THE OPERATION. I AM AFRAID THERE IS LITTLE HOPE.

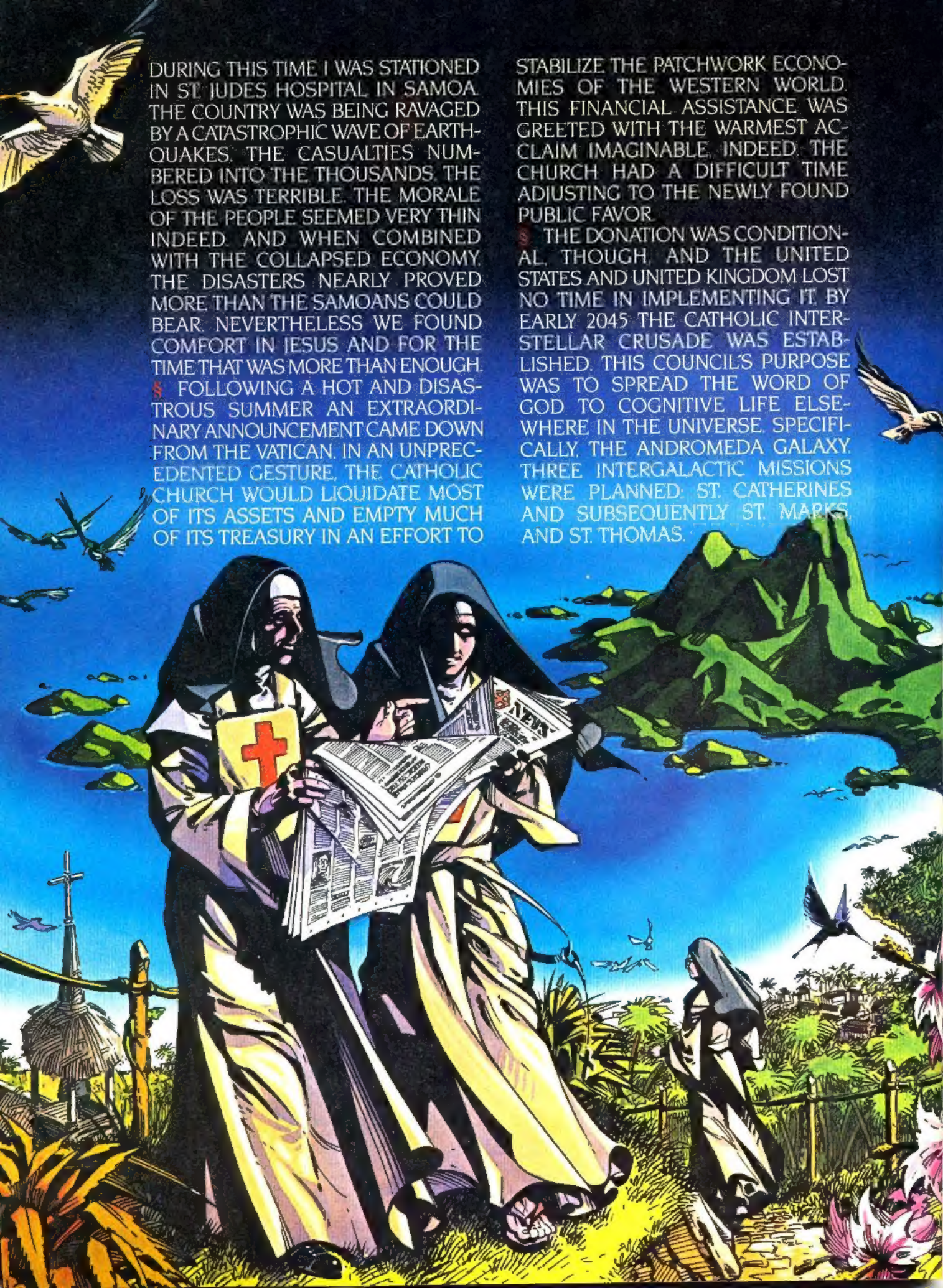
PRAY FOR THE CARDINAL, GENTLEMEN.

AND I SHALL PRAY FOR ALL OF US . . .

DURING THIS TIME I WAS STATIONED IN ST. JUDES HOSPITAL IN SAMOA. THE COUNTRY WAS BEING RAVAGED BY A CATASTROPHIC WAVE OF EARTHQUAKES. THE CASUALTIES NUMBERED INTO THE THOUSANDS. THE LOSS WAS TERRIBLE. THE MORALE OF THE PEOPLE SEEMED VERY THIN INDEED. AND WHEN COMBINED WITH THE COLLAPSED ECONOMY, THE DISASTERS NEARLY PROVED MORE THAN THE SAMOANS COULD BEAR. NEVERTHELESS WE FOUND COMFORT IN JESUS AND FOR THE TIME THAT WAS MORE THAN ENOUGH.

§ FOLLOWING A HOT AND DISASTROUS SUMMER AN EXTRAORDINARY ANNOUNCEMENT CAME DOWN FROM THE VATICAN. IN AN UNPRECEDENTED GESTURE, THE CATHOLIC CHURCH WOULD LIQUIDATE MOST OF ITS ASSETS AND EMPTY MUCH OF ITS TREASURY IN AN EFFORT TO STABILIZE THE PATCHWORK ECONOMIES OF THE WESTERN WORLD. THIS FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE WAS GREETED WITH THE WARMEST ACCLAIM IMAGINABLE, INDEED. THE CHURCH HAD A DIFFICULT TIME ADJUSTING TO THE NEWLY FOUND PUBLIC FAVOR.

§ THE DONATION WAS CONDITIONAL, THOUGH, AND THE UNITED STATES AND UNITED KINGDOM LOST NO TIME IN IMPLEMENTING IT. BY EARLY 2045 THE CATHOLIC INTERSTELLAR CRUSADE WAS ESTABLISHED. THIS COUNCIL'S PURPOSE WAS TO SPREAD THE WORD OF GOD TO COGNITIVE LIFE ELSEWHERE IN THE UNIVERSE. SPECIFICALLY, THE ANDROMEDA GALAXY. THREE INTERGALACTIC MISSIONS WERE PLANNED: ST. CATHERINES AND SUBSEQUENTLY ST. MARKS, AND ST. THOMAS.



WELL, WELL, VICTOR. WHY DON'T YOU JOIN ME IN DOING NOTHING WHILE THE WORLD COLLAPSES AROUND US?
SURELY YOU CAN TAKE SOME ACTION —
ACTION, MY FRIEND? IF ONLY IT WAS THAT SIMPLE. IF IT WAS ONLY A MATTER OF FIGHTING OUR WAY OUT. IT IS A WRETCHED THING TO SEE WHAT GLORY IS IN THE MORNING ONLY TO HAVE IT SNATCHED FROM YOU AT NIGHT. I KNOW WHAT IS INSIDE THE OBJECT. OUR ONLY HOPE NOW IS RETREAT.
THE ENGINES ARE STILL INTACT, IT'S ONLY THE CONTROL CIRCUITS THAT ARE SEIZED UP. IF WE CAN GET THEM WORKING WE CAN HIGH-TAIL IT BACK TO THE SOLAR SYSTEM, AND AT LEAST HAVE A CHANCE OF BEING RESCUED!
THE ARCHBISHOP WILL NEVER AGREE TO THAT.
THEN WE WILL COMMANDEER ST. CATHERINE'S YOU LOOK AFTER FRANKLIN AND THOSE CREATURES.
I'LL MEET YOU AND THE LEGION ON THE BRIDGE IN AN HOUR.
VICTOR . . . YOU WOULD RISK THE CHARGE OF INSUBORDINATION — OF MUTINY?
BROTHER JOSHUA, YOU ARE AN IDIOT.

BY THE WINTER OF 2045 ARCH BISHOP FRANKLIN HAD BEEN APPOINTED COMMANDER OF ST. CATHERINES MISSION BY CARDINAL MAUNROT, CHAIRMAN OF THE CIC. I DO NOT THINK ANY SELECTION COULD HAVE PROVEN MORE APPROPRIATE.

§ BISHOP GREGORY BROCK OF LONDON, ENGLAND HAD BEEN NAMED CAPTAIN OF THE MISSION. HE TURNED DOWN THE POSITION RELUCTANTLY. HIS REASON WAS THAT THE WIFE OF HIS LATE BROTHER HAD RECENTLY PASSED ON, LEAVING HIM WITH A SEVENTEEN YEAR OLD WARD, JOAN.

§ HOWEVER, THE CRUSADE GRANTED SPECIAL STATUS TO JOAN TO ENABLE HER TO ACCOMPANY HER UNCLE ON THE MISSION. I'VE ALWAYS FELT THAT SHE WOULD RATHER NOT HAVE BEEN GRANTED SUCH STATUS. ONLY YESTERDAY DID I LEARN THE REAL REASON FOR THE BISHOP'S INSISTENCE ON IT.

§ THE RESPONSIBILITY OF SELECTING AND RECRUITING POSSIBLE CLERGY, CONGREGATION AND CREW WAS THEN DELEGATED TO ARCH BISHOP FRANKLIN AND BISHOP BROCK. THE PROCESS WENT ON FOR ONE YEAR. ALL APPLICANTS WERE CAREFULLY SCREENED FOR THEIR SUITABILITY AND QUALIFICATIONS. THE OPERATION WAS CARRIED ON WITHOUT INCIDENT UNTIL SEPTEMBER OF 2046.

§ IT HAD BEEN PROPOSED THAT ST. CATHERINES CARRY SOME SORT OF MILITARY (OR AT LEAST ARMED) COMPLEMENT, FOR PROTECTION AGAINST HOSTILE LIFE-FORMS. AS I RECALL, THE VATICAN WAS VERY MUCH AGAINST THE IDEA, MAINTAINING THAT SUCH A GESTURE WOULD NOT ONLY BE INAPPROPRIATE, BUT CONTRARY TO THE PRINCIPLES OF THE MISSION.

§ ARCH BISHOP FRANKLIN HOWEVER, WAS ADAMENT. THERE WAS NO WAY OF DISCERNING EITHER THE TEMPERAMENT OR, AS HE PUT IT, "THE EATING HABITS" OF WHATEVER LIFE MIGHT BE ENCOUNTERED.

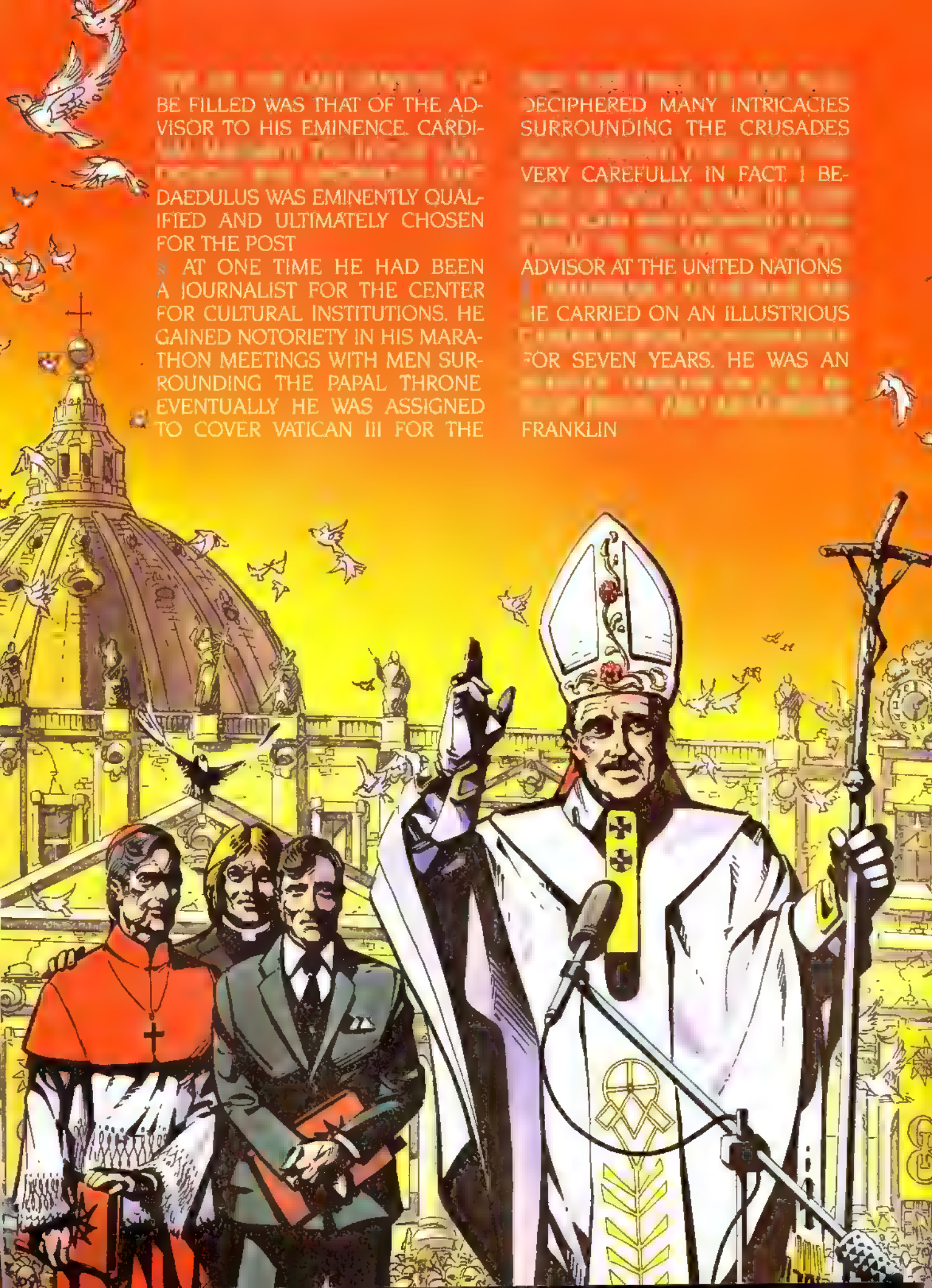
JOAN, I TRUST YOU'VE COME TO YOUR SENSES?
YES.
MY UNCLE DIED IN THE CLINIC ABOUT AN HOUR AGO. PERHAPS THE DEATH OF A GOOD MAN DOESN'T MEAN MUCH TO YOU. PERHAPS BEING A SOLDIER RENDERS DEATH BANAL. BUT HE WAS THE ONLY FLESH AND BLOOD I HAD. HE WAS MY SOLE LINK TO EARTH, AND PROBABLY, TO HEAVEN.
LISTEN, JOAN, I'M SORRY . . . BUT YOU MUST REALIZE —
NO, JOSHUA. I WANT NOTHING MORE TO DO WITH YOU.
WHAT? YOU CAN'T BE SERIOUS!! YOU CANNOT HOLD ME RESPONSIBLE FOR BISHOP BROCK'S DEATH! THOSE BLASPHEMOUS CREATURES KILLED YOUR UNCLE!
NO, I DID, IN A WAY. I SHOULD'VE DONE SOMETHING — SEVERAL THINGS ACTUALLY. I WAS WEAK, JOSHUA. YOU WERE STRONG . . .
BUT YOU ARE A SYMBOL OF THAT WEAKNESS NOW. AND THIS ISN'T THE TIME TO BE REMINDED OF IT. GOOD-BYE.

THE QUESTION WAS FINALLY RESOLVED IN THE ARCH BISHOP'S FAVOR. THOUGH PUBLIC AND ECCLESIASTICAL OPINION ON THE MATTER WAS EVENLY DIVIDED. THE LEGION OF PURIFICATION WAS CREATED AND GIVEN SPECIAL STANDING WITHIN THE CHURCH.

§ THE MANTLE OF CAPTAIN OF THE PURIFIERS FELL UPON MAJOR JOSHUA MILES,AN EX-NAVY PILOT. NOW TESTING EXPERIMENTAL AIRCRAFT FOR NASA. HE WAS WELCOMED INTO THE FOLD WITH A GREAT DEAL OF RESPECT AND SUPPORT. THE CONTROVERSY CONTINUED TO REVOLVE AROUND THE LEGION, THOUGH I BELIEVE MUCH OF IT WAS DUE TO A MISINFORMED PUBLIC.

§ IT CAME AS QUITE A SHOCK TO OUR CONVENT AT ST. JUDES WHEN WE LEARNED THAT OUR MOTHER SUPERIOR, ANAIS HERDENRY, HAD ALSO BEEN SELECTED FOR THE CRUSADE. IT WAS HER DUTY TO FORM AND GOVERN THE CONVENT ON BOARD ST. CATHERINES MISSION.

§ IT CAME AS AN EVEN GREATER SHOCK WHEN SHE ASKED ME IF I WOULD ACCOMPANY HER. I SHALL NEVER FORGET THE ELATION AND SPIRITUAL BRILLIANCE THAT FILLED ME AT THAT POINT. MY ACCEPTANCE OF MOTHER ANAIS' OFFER BROUGHT A SIGNIFICANCE TO MY LIFE SECOND ONLY TO MY MARRIAGE TO OUR SAVIOUR. I WAS GOING TO THE STARS. I SPENT MUCH OF THAT DAY IN PRAYER.


BE FILLED WAS THAT OF THE AD-
VISOR TO HIS EMINENCE. CARDI-
DAEDULUS WAS EMINENTLY QUAL-
IFIED AND ULTIMATELY CHOSEN
FOR THE POST
AT ONE TIME HE HAD BEEN
A JOURNALIST FOR THE CENTER
FOR CULTURAL INSTITUTIONS. HE
GAINED NOTORIETY IN HIS MARA-
THON MEETINGS WITH MEN SUR-
ROUNDING THE PAPAL THRONE
EVENTUALLY HE WAS ASSIGNED
TO COVER VATICAN III FOR THE
DECIPHERED MANY INTRICACIES
SURROUNDING THE CRUSADES
VERY CAREFULLY. IN FACT, I BE-
ADVISOR AT THE UNITED NATIONS
IE CARRIED ON AN ILLUSTRIOUS
FOR SEVEN YEARS. HE WAS AN
FRANKLIN

WHAT DO YOU MEAN YOU CAN'T HELP?
THIS IS NOTHING BUT TREASON! IT'S THAT SIMPLE. IT GOES AGAINST EVERY PRINCIPLE WITHIN THE CHURCH! I WANT NO PART OF IT!

continues on page 92

IN THE MIDDLE AGES BATHING WAS CONSIDERED QUITE UNHEALTHY.
.. WASHING IT WAS SAID, DESTROYED THE BODY'S OWN OILS AND WIPED AWAY THE SKIN'S PROTECTIVE NATURAL WARMTH...
...PEOPLE WERE ACTUALLY BELIEVED TO HAVE DIED AS A RESULT OF TOO MUCH WATER...
...WE KNOW NOW, OF COURSE, THAT QUITE THE OPPOSITE IS TRUE...
. AND THE WARM CASCADING WATER PRODUCES A FEELING OF WELL-BEING AND PEACEFULNESS.
. AND OFTEN BRINGS ON A STATE OF NEAR-ECSTATIC DREAMINESS...
AND SOMETIMES THAT ALL TOO FAMILIAR SENSATION...
OF BEING WATCHED!
SMILE TOOTS! YOU'RE ON CANDID CAMERA! CLICK!
HARRY! YOU ASS! YOU SCARED ME HALF TO DEATH!!
YOU'RE SCARED? WHAT SCARES ME IS HOW YOU SPEND EVERY POSSIBLE MOMENT IN THE BATHROOM! NOW THAT'S REALLY SCARY!
IT'S THE ONLY PRIVACY I GET! BESIDES...
... I LIKE THE WATER! NOW GO AWAY!
OH, YOU LIKE THE WATER, ALRIGHT! I THINK MAYBE YOU LIKE IT A LITTLE TOO MUCH!

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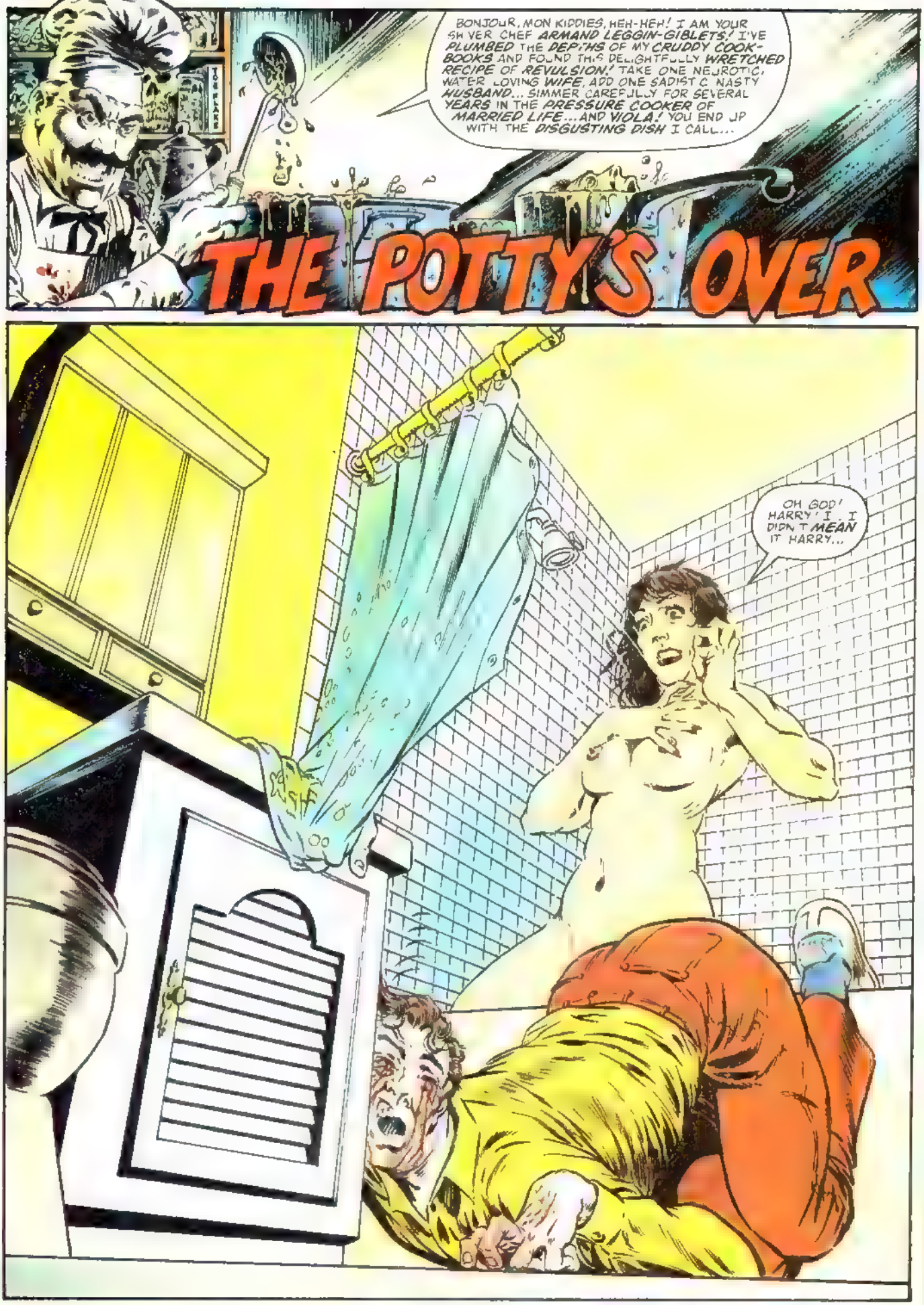
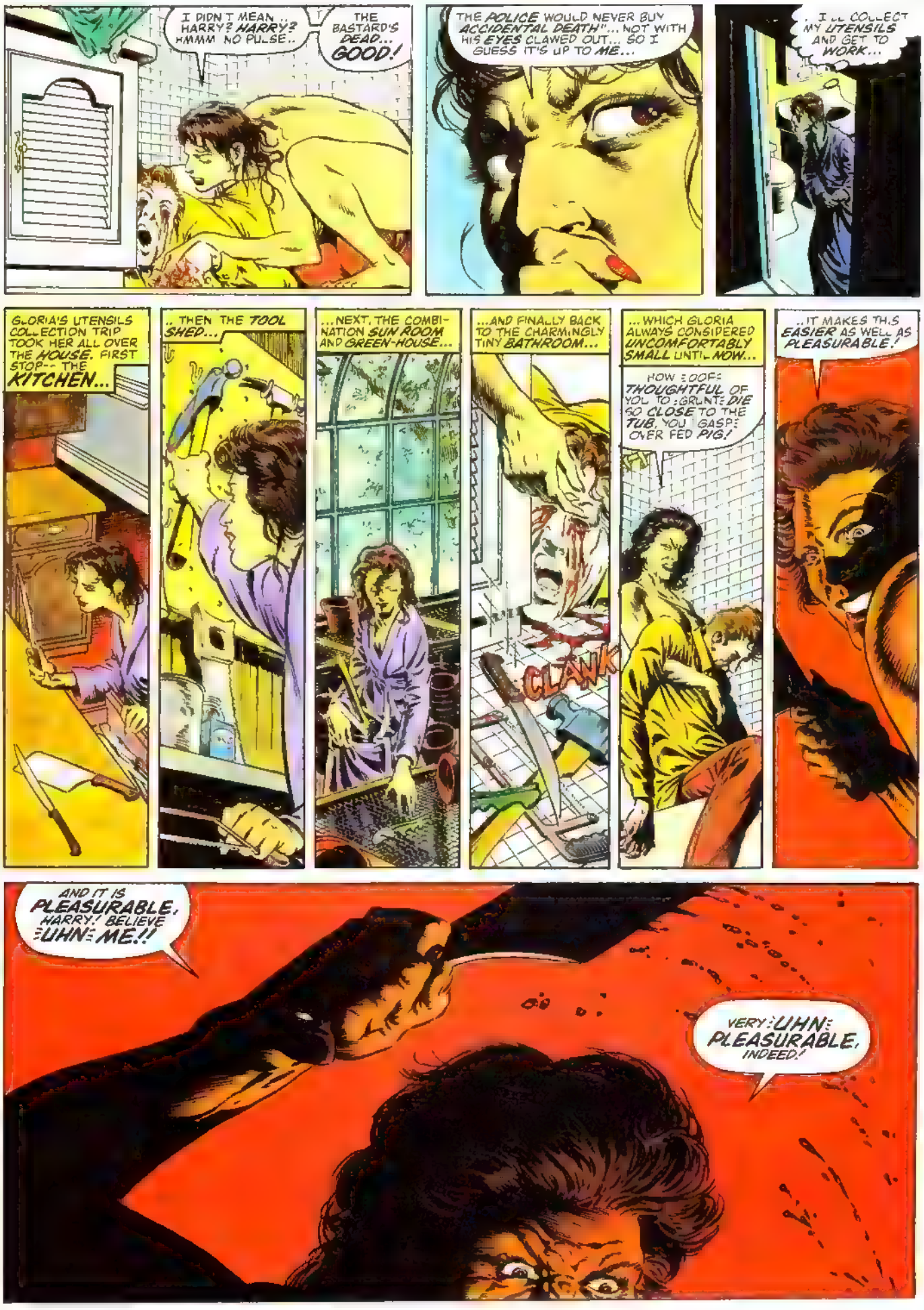
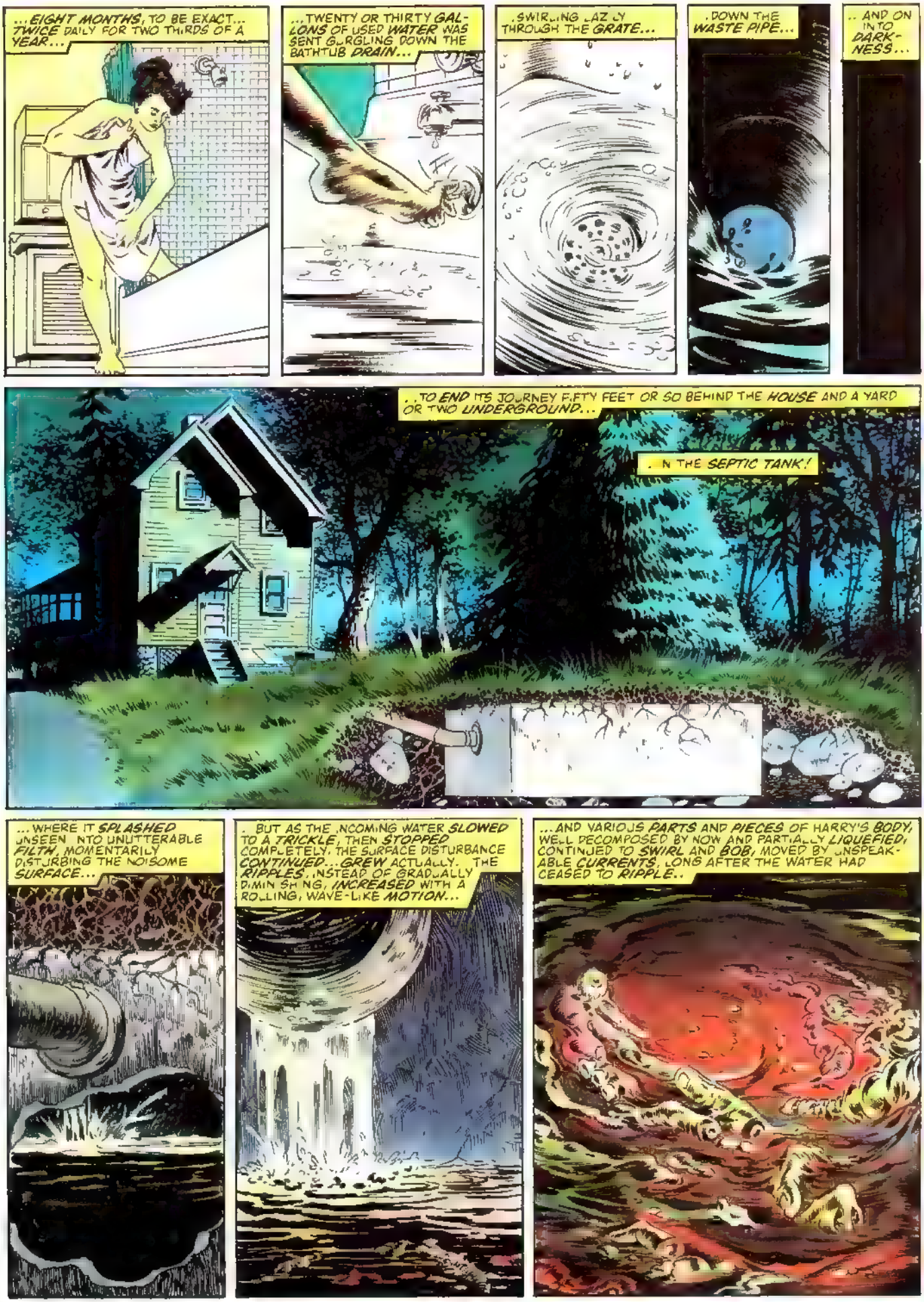
I THINK WE SHOULD JUST TURN THE WATER OFF FOR A WHILE. HAVE US A LITTLE TALK...
GET OUT, HARRY.
WE'LL JUST TURN IT OFF FOR NOW..
HARRY! GET THE HELL OUT OF THE TUB!
DON'T TOUCH THE FAUCET, HARRY...
C'MON HONEY! WE'LL JUST TURN IT...
HARRY, LEAVE ME THE HELL ALONE!!
OH, CHRIST! MY EYES!
LEAVE ME ALONE!!
MY EYES! MY EYEEEEEES!!
OH GOD!! MY EYES! MY EY--!
K-KRACK!
OH, MY LORD! HARRY!


BONJOUR, MON KIDDIES, HEH-HEH! I AM YOUR SHIVER CHEF ARMAND LEGGIN-GIBLETS! I'VE PLUMBED THE DEPTHS OF MY CRUDDY COOK-BOOKS AND FOUND THIS DELIGHTFULLY WRETCHED RECIPE OF REVULSION! TAKE ONE NEUROTIC, WATER LOVING WIFE, ADD ONE SADISTIC NASTY HUSBAND... SIMMER CAREFULLY FOR SEVERAL YEARS IN THE PRESSURE COOKER OF MARRIED LIFE... AND VIOLA! YOU END UP WITH THE DISGUSTING DISH I CALL...
THE POTTY'S OVER
OH GOD! HARRY! I... I DIDN'T MEAN IT HARRY...


I DIDN'T MEAN.. HARRY? HARRY? HMMM NO PULSE..
THE BASTARD'S DEAD... GOOD!
THE POLICE WOULD NEVER BUY "ACCIDENTAL DEATH"... NOT WITH HIS EYES CLAWED OUT... SO I GUESS IT'S UP TO ME...
.. I'LL COLLECT MY UTENSILS AND GET TO WORK...
GLORIA'S UTENSILS COLLECTION TRIP TOOK HER ALL OVER THE HOUSE. FIRST STOP-- THE KITCHEN...
.. THEN THE TOOL SHED...
...NEXT, THE COMBINATION SUN ROOM AND GREEN-HOUSE...
...AND FINALLY BACK TO THE CHARMINGLY TINY BATHROOM...
CLANK
...WHICH GLORIA ALWAYS CONSIDERED UNCOMFORTABLY SMALL UNTIL NOW...
HOW :OOF: THOUGHTFUL OF YOU TO :GRUNT: DIE SO CLOSE TO THE TUB, YOU :GASP: OVER FED PIG!
..IT MAKES THIS EASIER AS WELL AS PLEASURABLE!
AND IT IS PLEASURABLE, HARRY! BELIEVE :UHN: ME!!
VERY :UHN: PLEASURABLE, INDEED!

AS FAR BACK AS GLORIA COULD REMEMBER SHE'D ALWAYS LOVED THE WATER BE T THE OCEAN, THE COMMUNITY POOL...
. EVEN HER OWN BATHTUB, SHE'D ALWAYS FELT AN ALMOST MYSTICAL ATTACHMENT TO IT .
.. WATER ALWAYS HAD THE AB LITY TO JUST "WASH HER CARES AWAY"... MAKE THEM DISAPPEAR...
BLOOP
SKLI-SH
...RIGHT DOWN THE DRAIN...
FLU
GURSH
...EVEN WHEN THINGS WERE ESPECIALLY TOUGH...
...WHEN SHE JUST DIDN'T KNOW IF SHE'D BE ABLE TO CUT IT
...WHEN THE LOAD BECAME ALMOST TOO HEAVY TO CARRY...
...SHE KNEW THAT IF PUSH CAME TO SHOVE...
PUSH
...SHE COULD ALWAYS UNCLOG THE PLUMBING OF HER EMOT ONS. .
JIGGLE JIGGLE
GLUBSHURSH
...ALWAYS SPLASH AWAY THE DEBRIS...
SK LA SH
...ALWAYS MOP UP THE STAINS AND SPATTERS...
.ALWAYS SCRUB AWAY THE STICKY AND PERSISTENT REMAINS OF EVERYTHING THAT USED TO CLUTTER AND STIFLE HER LIFE...
. WITH WATER!

THE SIMPLE ACT OF BATHING HAD ALWAYS GIVEN HER SUCH PEACE AND RELAXATION...
TOO HOT... TOO HOT. THERE! JUST RIGHT!
...A CLEANSING SO THOROUGH IT SEEMED TO REACH ALL THE WAY TO HER SOUL...
OH! THIS FEELS SOOOO GOOD..
...A WARMTH SO PROFOUND, THAT ONCE SHE BEGAN, SHE FOUND IT ALMOST IMPOSSIBLE TO STOP. .SO SHE STAYED...
I THINK I'M JUST GOING TO STAY IN THE TUB FOREVER...
...AND STAY SHE DID, HOUR AFTER HOUR...
...DAY IN AND DAY OUT...
...AND WITH NO ONE AND NOTHING TO DISTURB HER, THE DAYS STRETCHED INTO WEEKS...
...AND THE WEEKS, AS WEEKS WILL, ACCUMULATED INTO MONTHS...


...EIGHT MONTHS, TO BE EXACT... TWICE DAILY FOR TWO THIRDS OF A YEAR...
...TWENTY OR THIRTY GALLONS OF USED WATER WAS SENT GURGLING DOWN THE BATHTUB DRAIN...
...SWIRLING LAZILY THROUGH THE GRATE...
...DOWN THE WASTE PIPE...
...AND ON INTO DARKNESS...
...TO END ITS JOURNEY FIFTY FEET OR SO BEHIND THE HOUSE AND A YARD OR TWO UNDERGROUND...
...IN THE SEPTIC TANK!
...WHERE IT SPLASHED UNSEEN INTO UNUTTERABLE FILTH, MOMENTARILY DISTURBING THE NOISOME SURFACE...
...BUT AS THE INCOMING WATER SLOWED TO A TRICKLE, THEN STOPPED COMPLETELY, THE SURFACE DISTURBANCE CONTINUED...GREW ACTUALLY. THE RIPPLES, INSTEAD OF GRADUALLY DIMINISHING, INCREASED WITH A ROLLING, WAVE-LIKE MOTION...
...AND VARIOUS PARTS AND PIECES OF HARRY'S BODY, WELL DECOMPOSED BY NOW AND PARTIALLY LIQUEFIED, CONTINUED TO SWIRL AND BOB, MOVED BY UNSPEAKABLE CURRENTS, LONG AFTER THE WATER HAD CEASED TO RIPPLE..

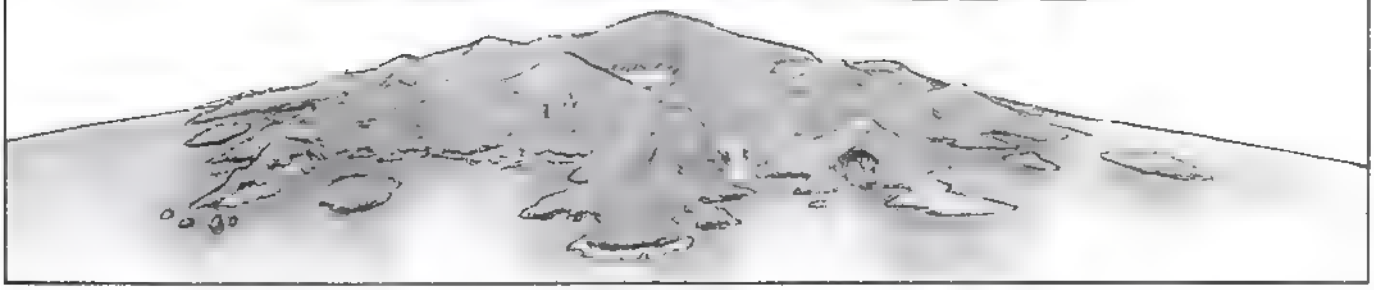
...AND THE SW.RL NG GREW FASTER, MORE URGENT AS IF THE NOX OUS CONTENT OF THE SEPTIC TANK HAD TAKEN ON A TERRIBLE LIFE OF ITS OWN...
. UNTIL A WAVE . MORE LIKE A FORM-LESS LIQUID ARM, ACTUALLY... FLUNG ITSELF UP AND INTO THE WASTE-PIPE INLET .. PULL NG, GROPING FORWARD...
...SLITHERING AND UNDULATING LIKE SOME HUGE, VISCOUS SNAKE, THE LOATH-SOME MESS MADE ITS WAY UP THE PIPE, TOWARD THE HOUSE...
...AND THE BATHROOM, WHERE AT THAT VERY MOMENT, GLORIA WAS INDULGING HERSELF IN THE SHOWER...
...HER REVERIE WAS SUDDENLY BROKEN BY SOMETHING GONE AMISS...
WHAT THE--?! THE DRAIN'S CLOGGED!
...SOMETH NG.
THAT'S FUNNY...IT WAS CLEAR JUST A MOMENT AGO...
...AND WHAT'S THAT WE.RD GURGLING SOUND?
...SOMETHING GONE VERY MUCH AMISS INDEED...
AND THIS!? WHAT S-- IT SMELLS LIKE--

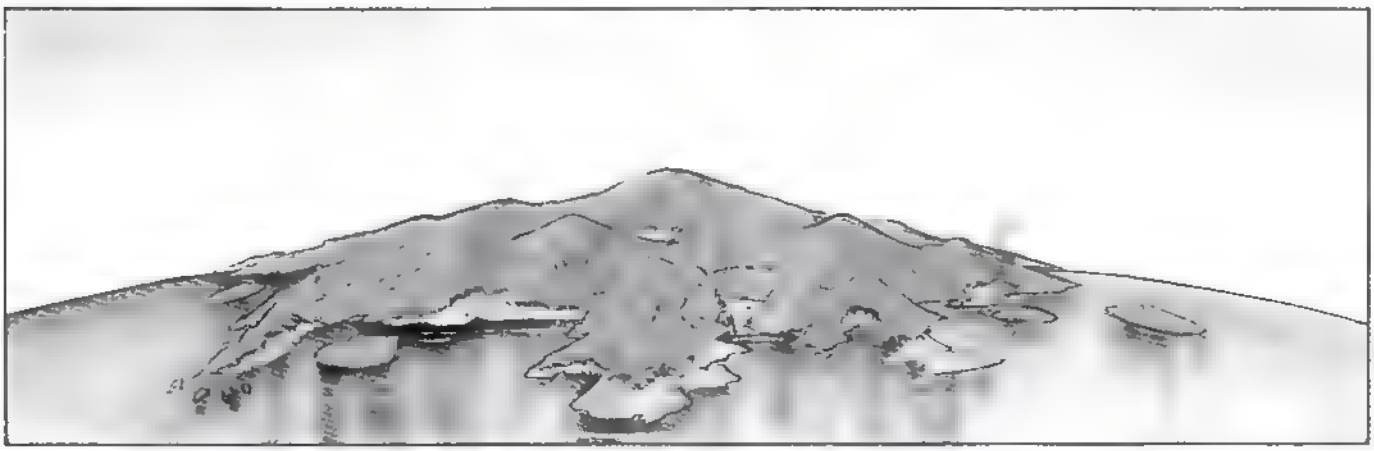
YAAAAGHHH!
FWA-LURSSHHH
OH MY GOD! IT-IT'S ALL OVER ME! AND THE :GAG: THE STENCH!
GOTTA GET IT--GOT TO RUB IT OFF...
...IT-- IT'S NOT COMING OFF... IT...
...IT'S GETTING... TIGHT! IT--OH, GOD! IT'S SQUEEZING...
...SQUEEZING ME! IT-- IT'S CRUSHING...
BUT HONEY, I LOVE YOU SO MUCH I CAN'T HELP BUT SQUEEEEZE YOU!

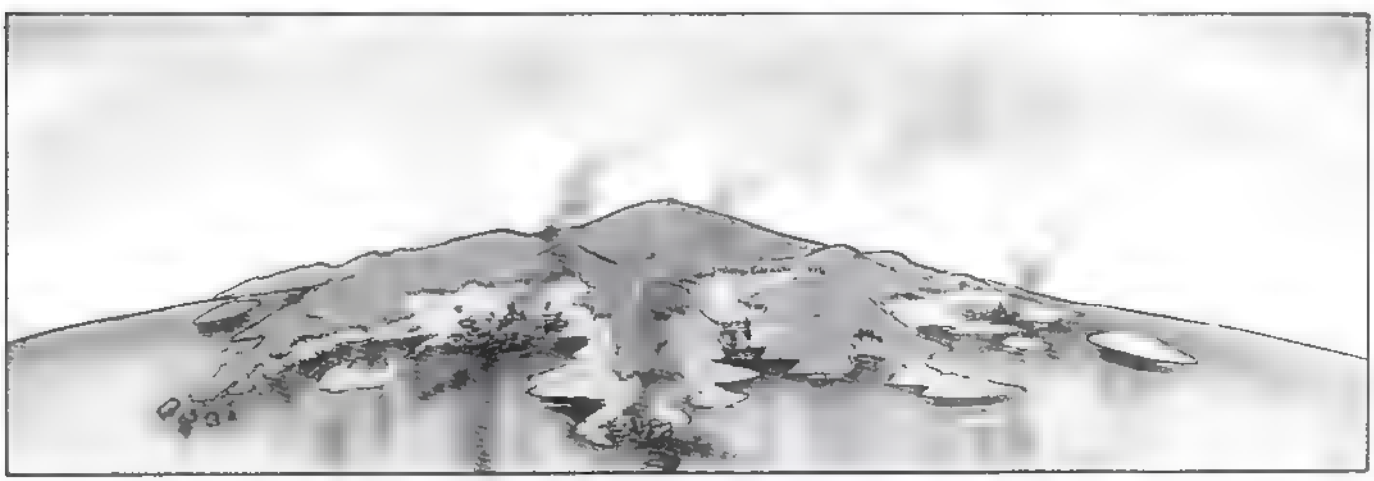
THAT-- THAT'S HARRY'S VOICE! BUT HOW..
THAT'S RIGHT, HONEY! SURPRISED?
BUT-- BUT, I DON'T UNDERSTAND? HARRY...
WHY YOU MUST BE DISPOSED OF, MY DEAR... MUCH THE SAME AS YOU DISPOSED OF ME!
POETIC JUSTICE AND ALL THAT YOU KNOW?
BUT SINCE MY PRESENT CONDITION PREVENTS ME FROM HOLDING A KNIFE...
OH NO! HARRY! NO!!
...I'LL JUST HAVE TO DEAL WITH YOU IN MY OWN WAY...
...EVER FLUSH A SHIRT DOWN THE TOILET, SWEETIE? YOU CAN'T RIP IT UP, FIRST! OH NO.. THAT'S CHEATING!
OH, GOD! NO-- NO! NO!
WHAT YOU DO'S YOU CRUMPLE IT UP, FIRST. LIKE SO...
CRACK
SNAP
OH GOD! OH GOD! OH GOD OHGOD OHGODOHGOD OHGOD!!
...THEN FLUSH AND FLUSH AND FLUSH IT DOWN...
NO-- NO! HARRY! HARRY!!
HAAAAAARRRREEEEEEEE!!
JIGGLE JIGGLE JIGGLE
BLORSH-- FLURSH PLU-GORSSHH
...AN INCH AT A TIME!!
BLURSH FLURGLE GLOOSHH

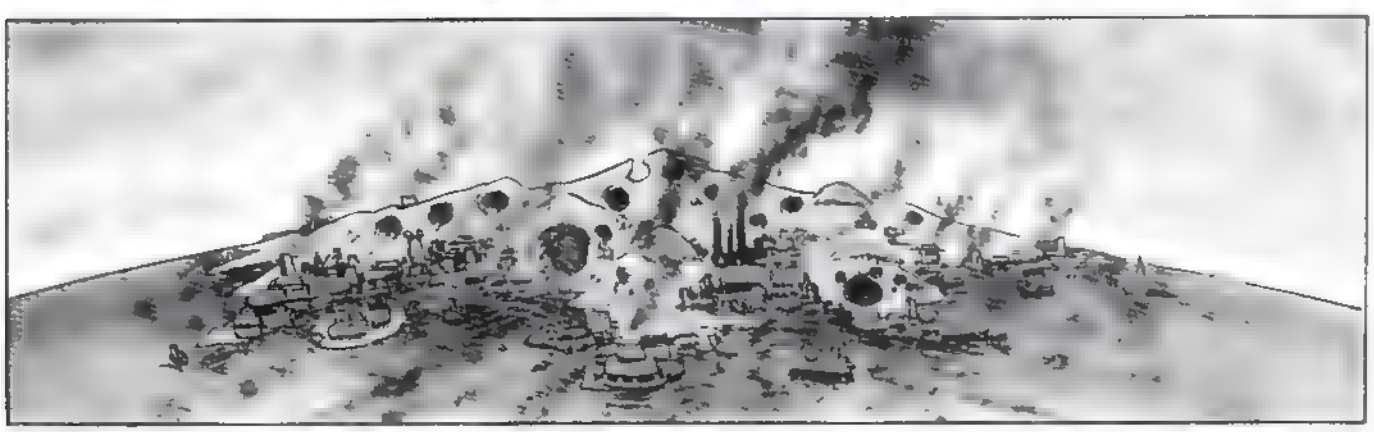
AN HOUR OR SO LATER...
HAR -HARRY! :GASP: HARRY!
..AND SO THE TIME HAS COME, MY DEAR...
..TO BID YOU SAD SWEET ADIEU...
OH GOD, HARRY, PLEASE!
BUT DESPAIR THEE NOT!
PLEASE, NO! NOOOOOOOOO...
I'M ONLY SENDING YOU ON AHEAD!..
...I'LL FOLLOW SHORTLY...
..YOU'LL LIKE OUR LITTLE NEST...
..YOU'D BETTER...
...YOU'RE GOING TO BE THERE...
...A LONG, LONG...
OH GOD HARRY PLEASE
..TIME!!
PLEASE HARRY FL--GLUB BLUB
BLURGA
LURGA
LURGLE
FLU-GURSH
WELL, CUTLETS, DID YOU ENJOY YOUR SLIMEY SNACK? IT SHOWS WHAT HAPPENS TO MARRIAGE AFTER LOVE FLUE THE COOP. THE WHOLE DEAL GOES RIGHT DOWN THE DRAIN, HEH-HEH! OR AS HAMLET SAID-- "TOILET OR NOT TOILET, THAT IS THE QUESTION."

LANDMASS









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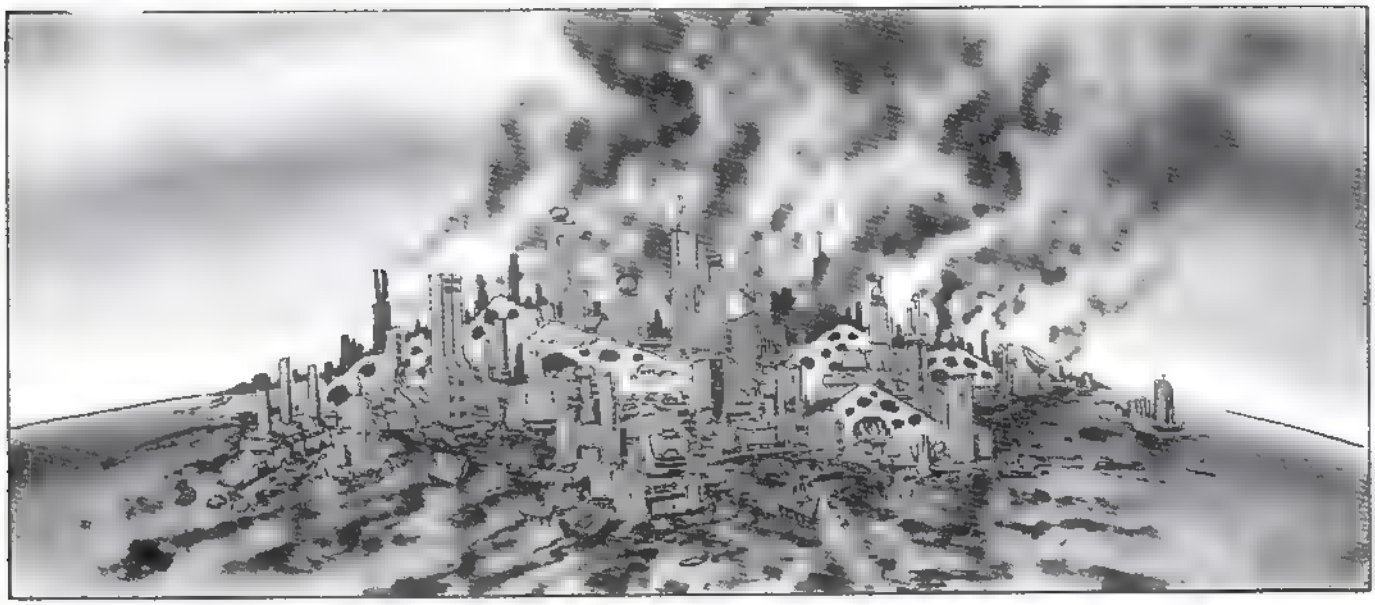
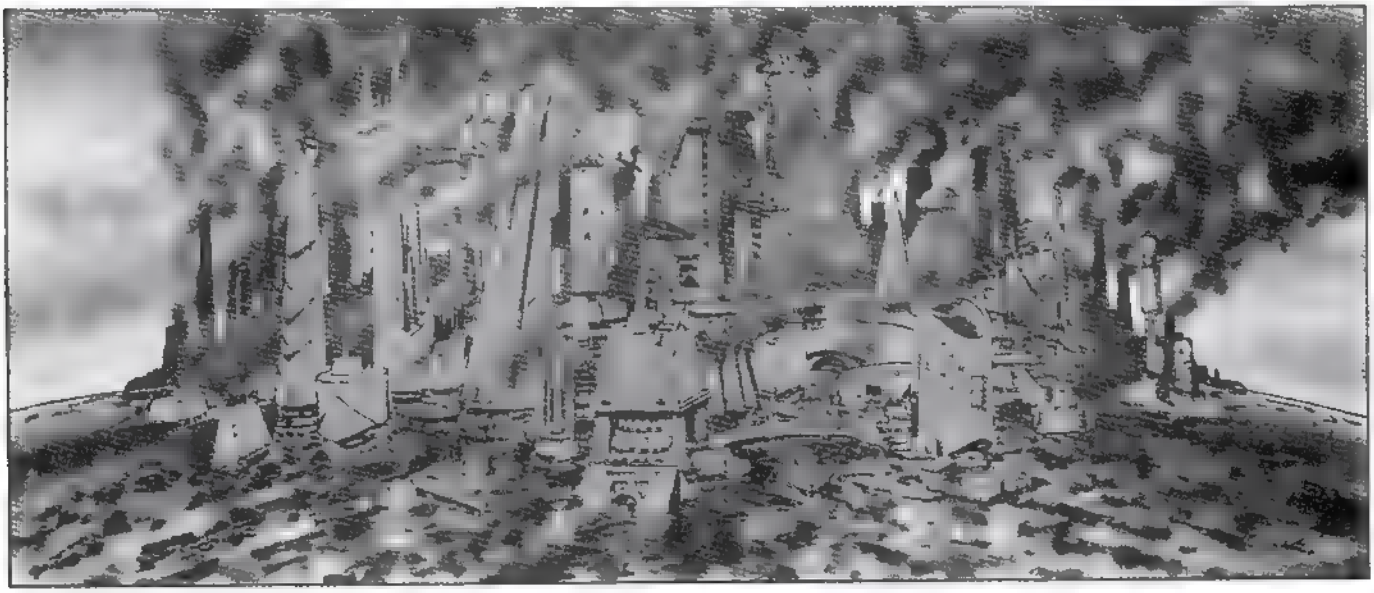
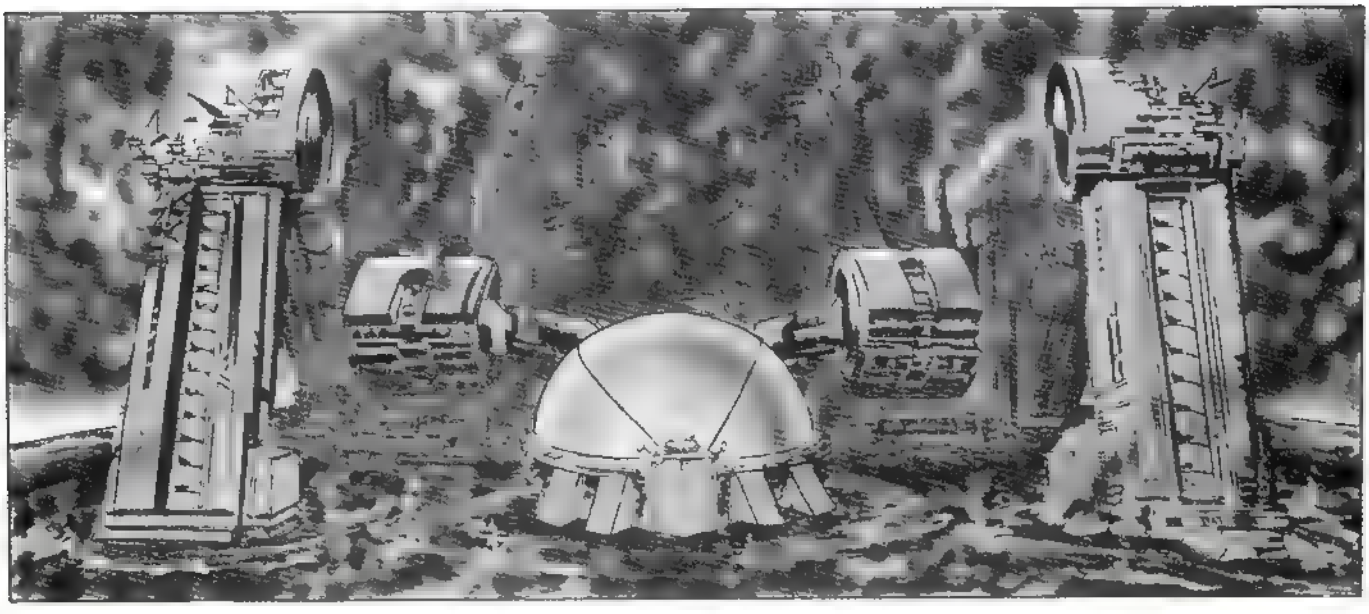
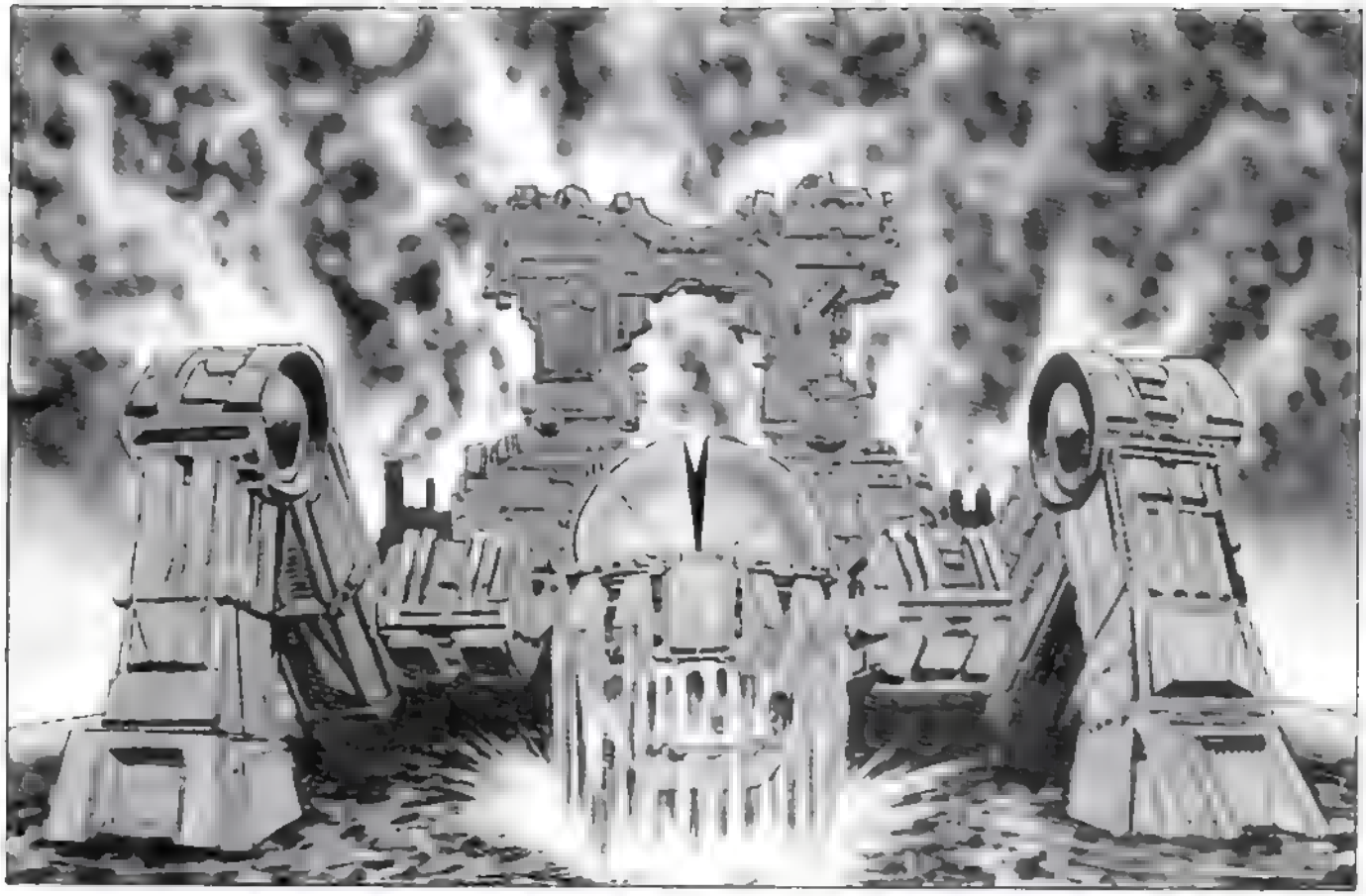
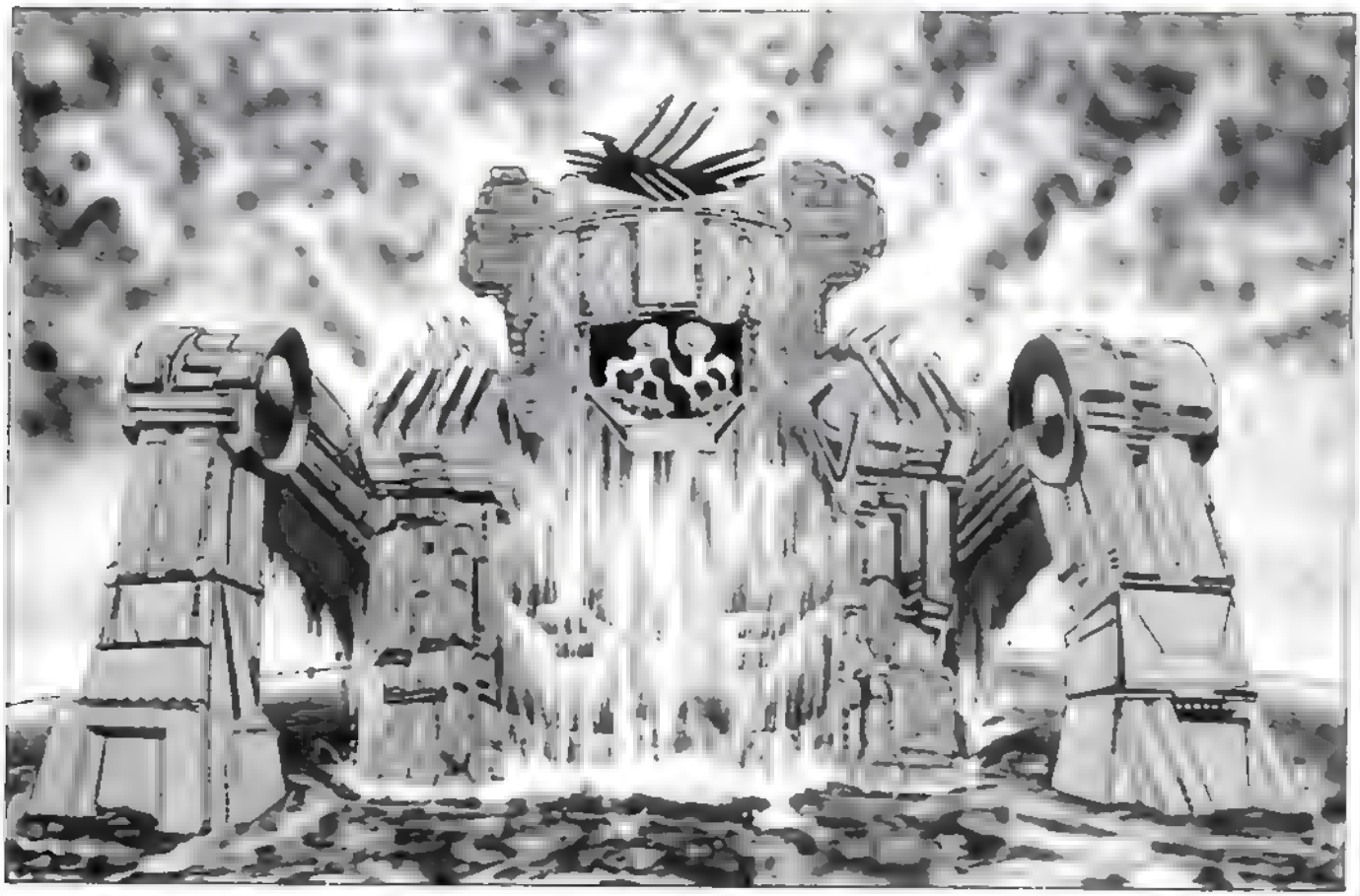
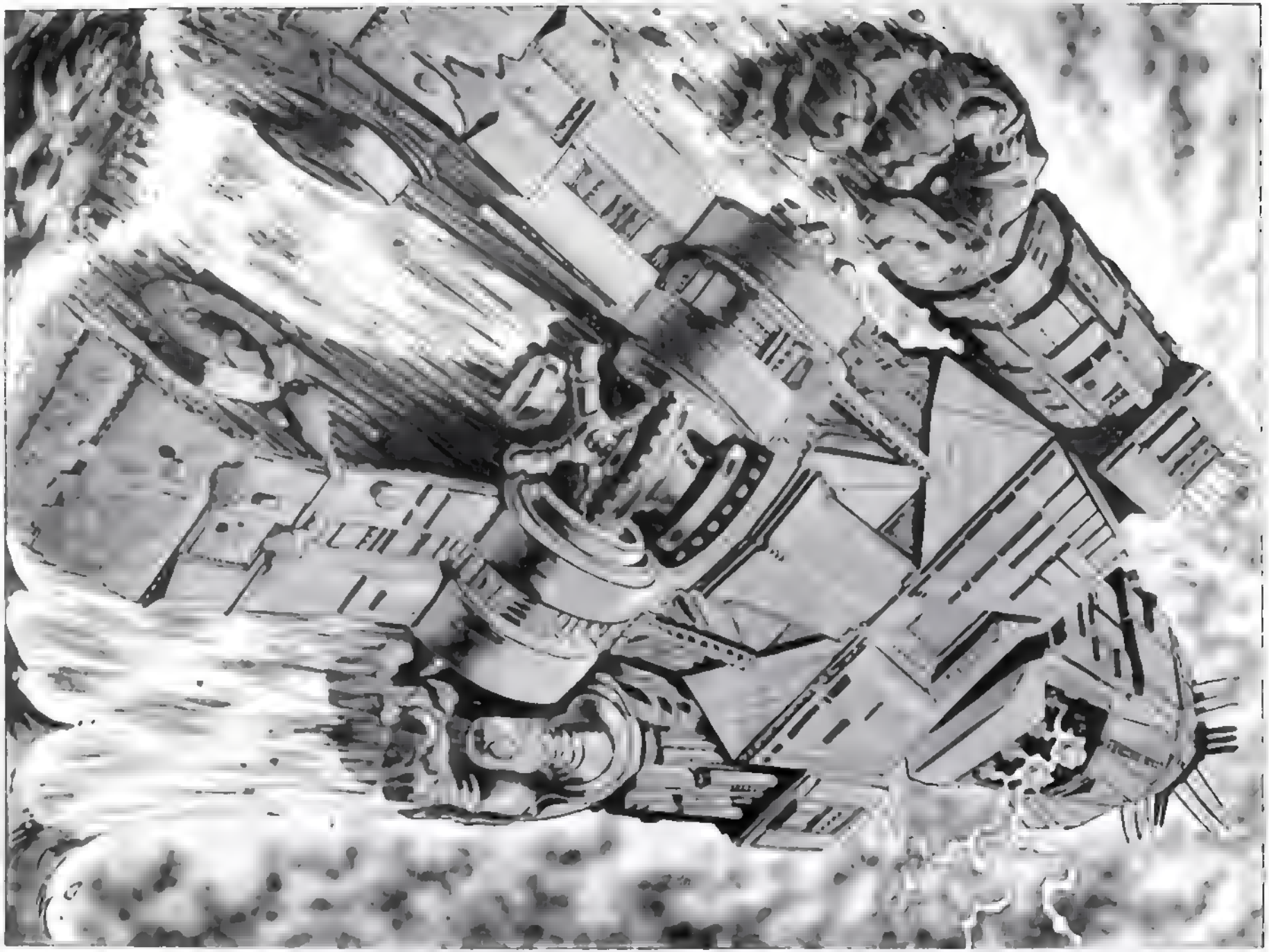


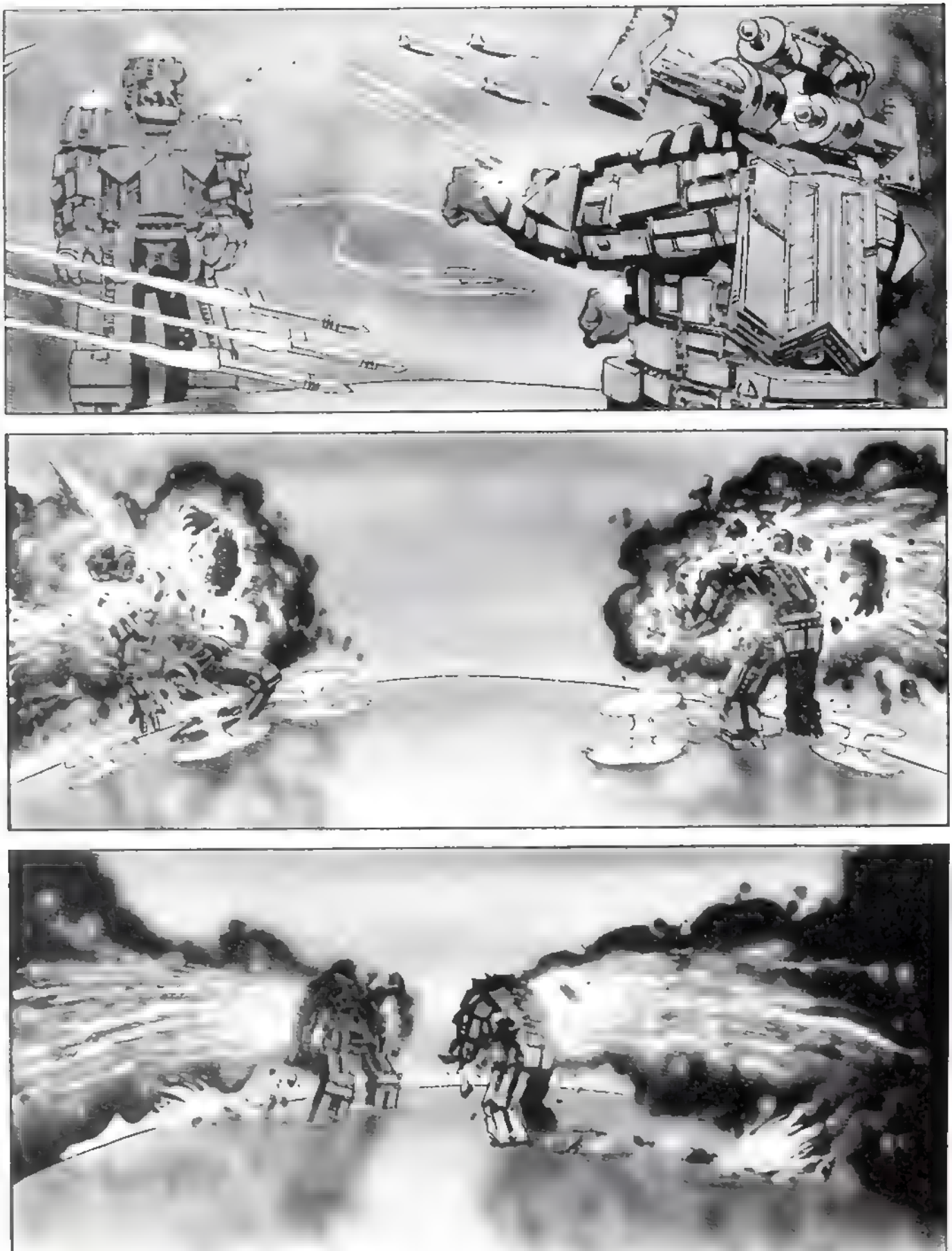


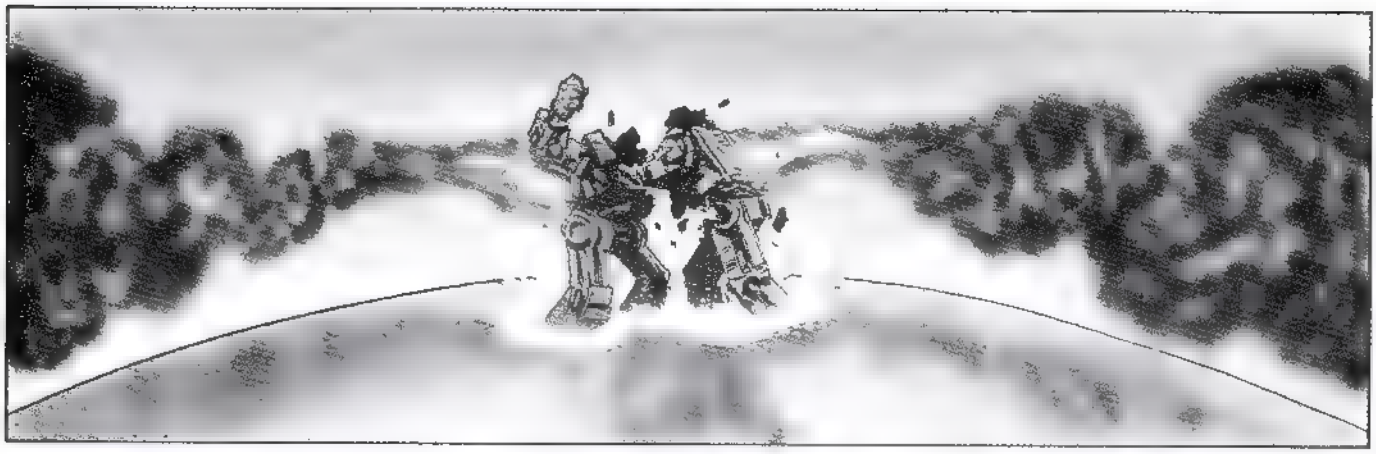


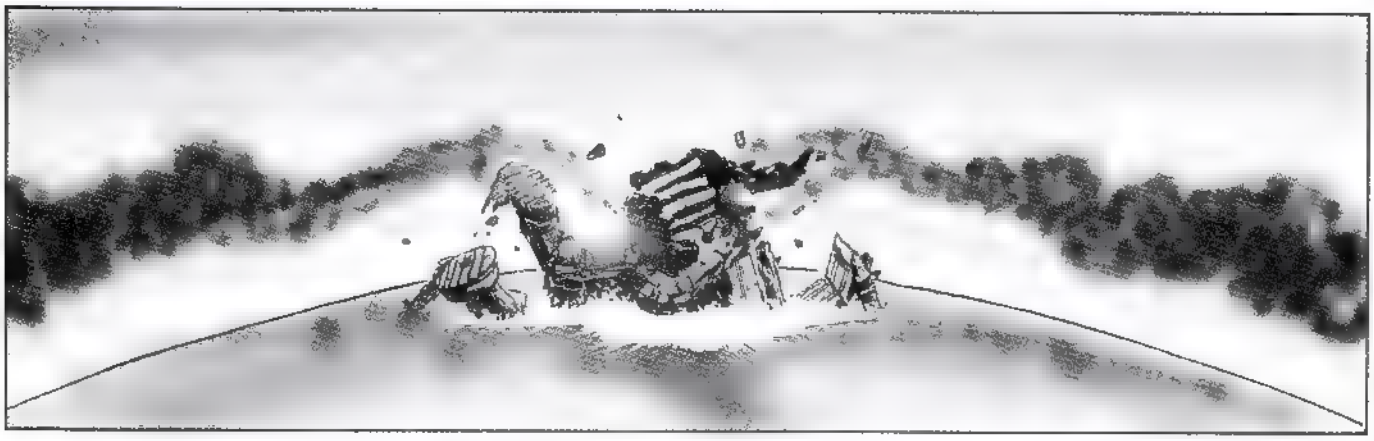


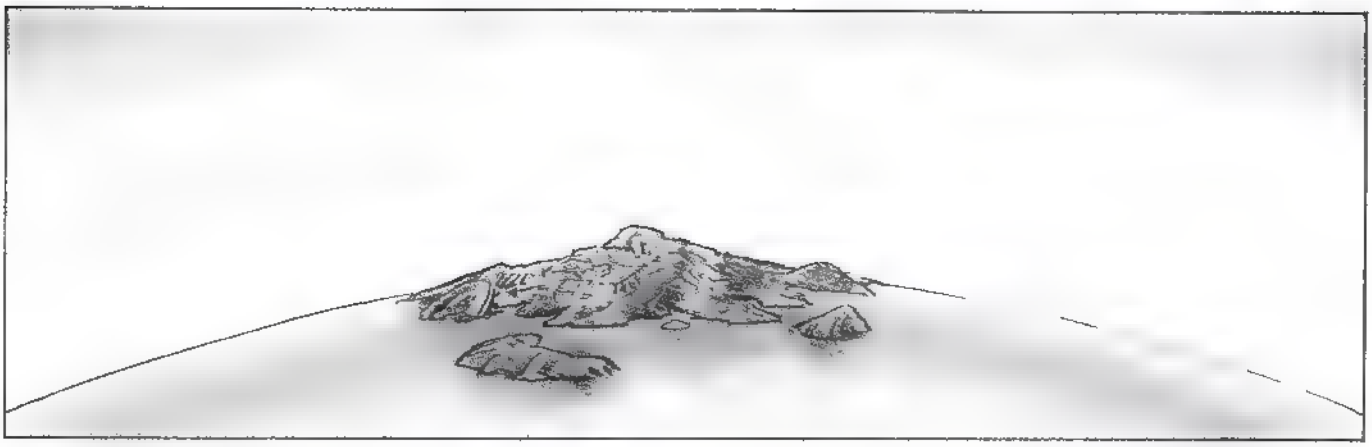


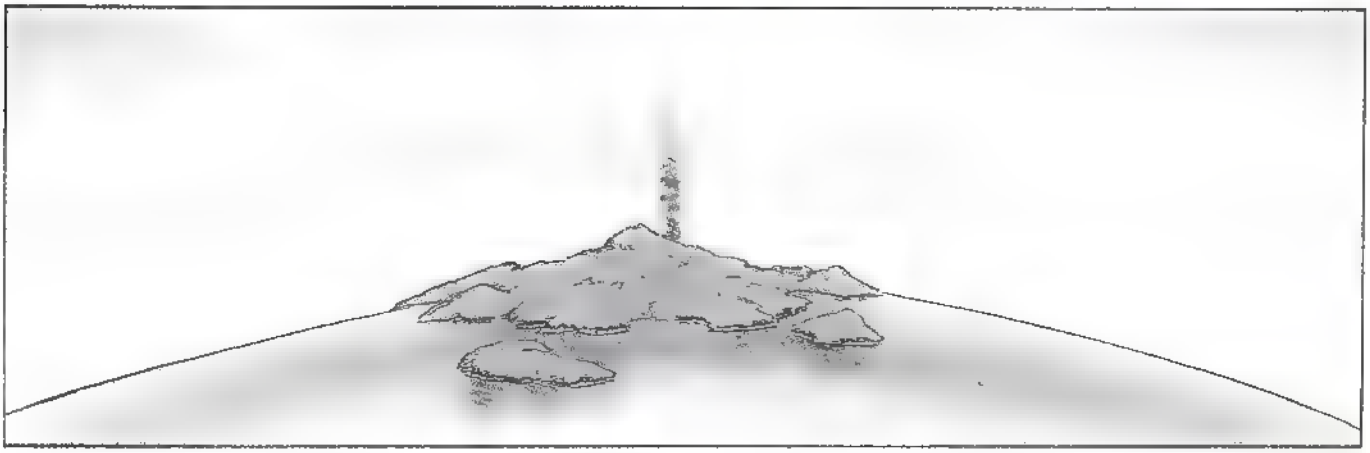






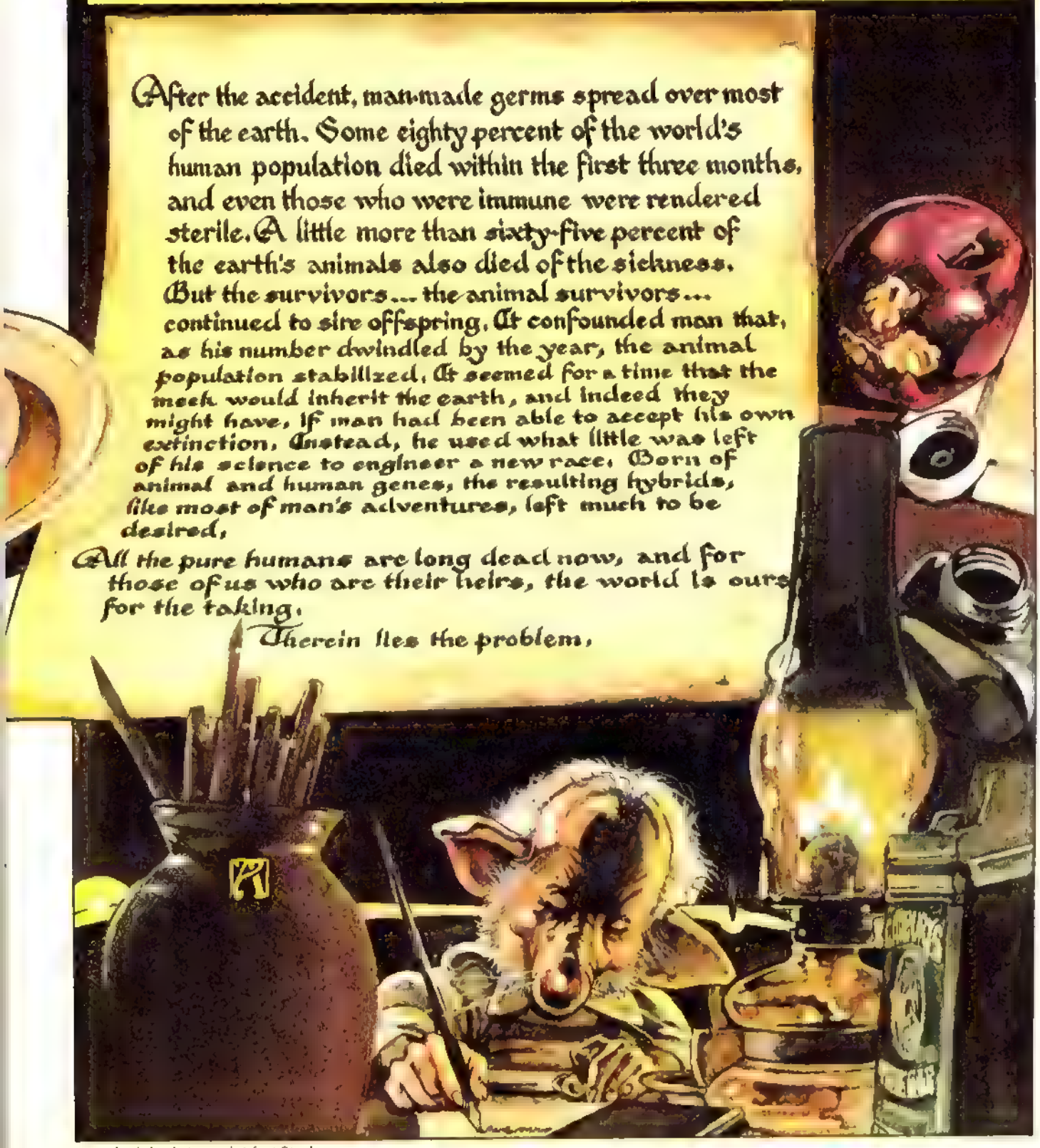






APOCRYPHA

D.H GUTTERMAN'S GREAT, GREAT, GREAT GRANDMOTHER WAS A SIMPLE LAB MOUSE. HER HUSBAND WAS MANKIND. FOUR GENERATIONS AND ONE HUNDRED AND TWENTY-SIX YEARS LATER, THEY PRODUCED THE ONLY LIVING POET OF RABUN COUNTY, GEORGIA.


After the accident, man-made germs spread over most of the earth. Some eighty percent of the world's human population died within the first three months, and even those who were immune were rendered sterile. A little more than sixty-five percent of the earth's animals also died of the sickness. But the survivors... the animal survivors... continued to sire offspring. It confounded man that, as his number dwindled by the year, the animal population stabilized. It seemed for a time that the meek would inherit the earth, and indeed they might have, if man had been able to accept his own extinction. Instead, he used what little was left of his science to engineer a new race. Born of animal and human genes, the resulting hybrids, like most of man's adventures, left much to be desired.
All the pure humans are long dead now, and for those of us who are their heirs, the world is ours for the taking.
Therein lies the problem.

story by John Lakey / Artifact Studios
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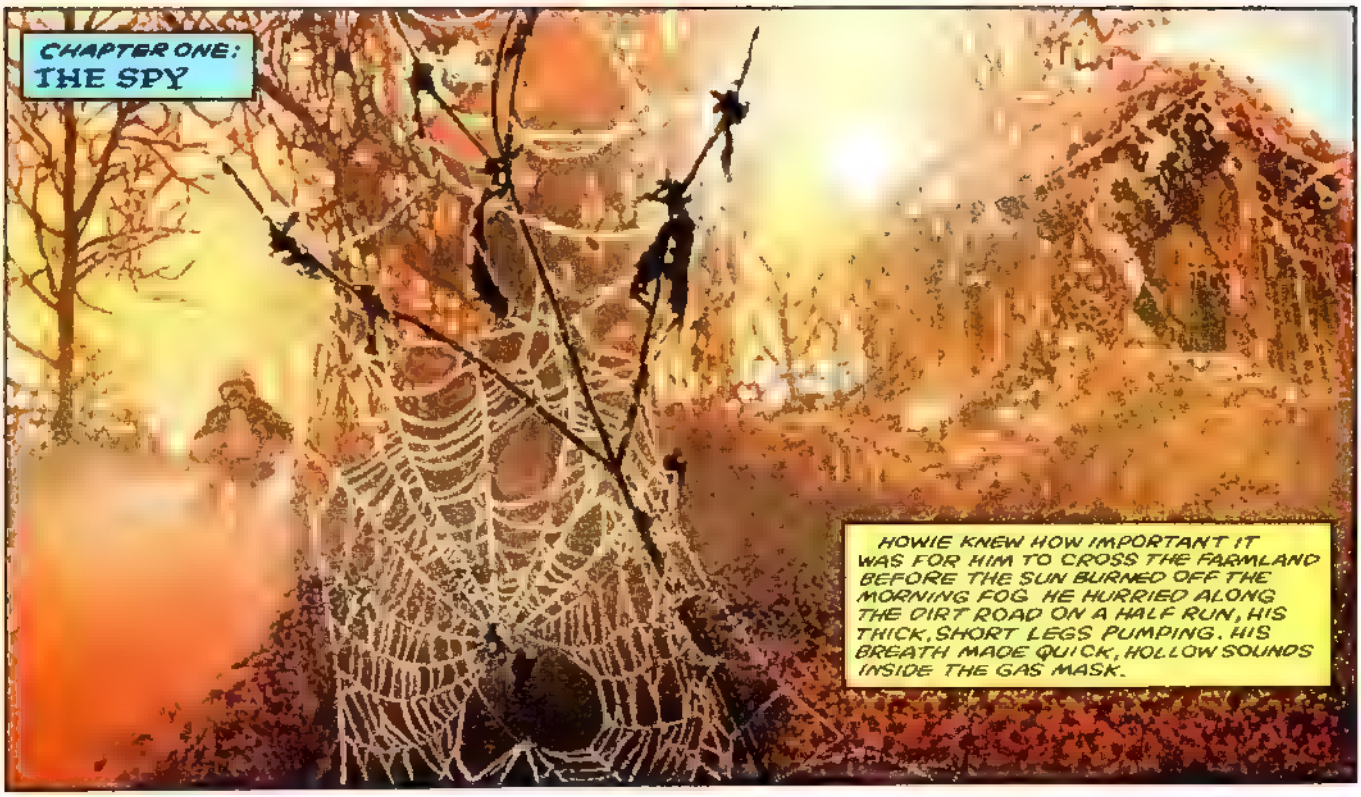
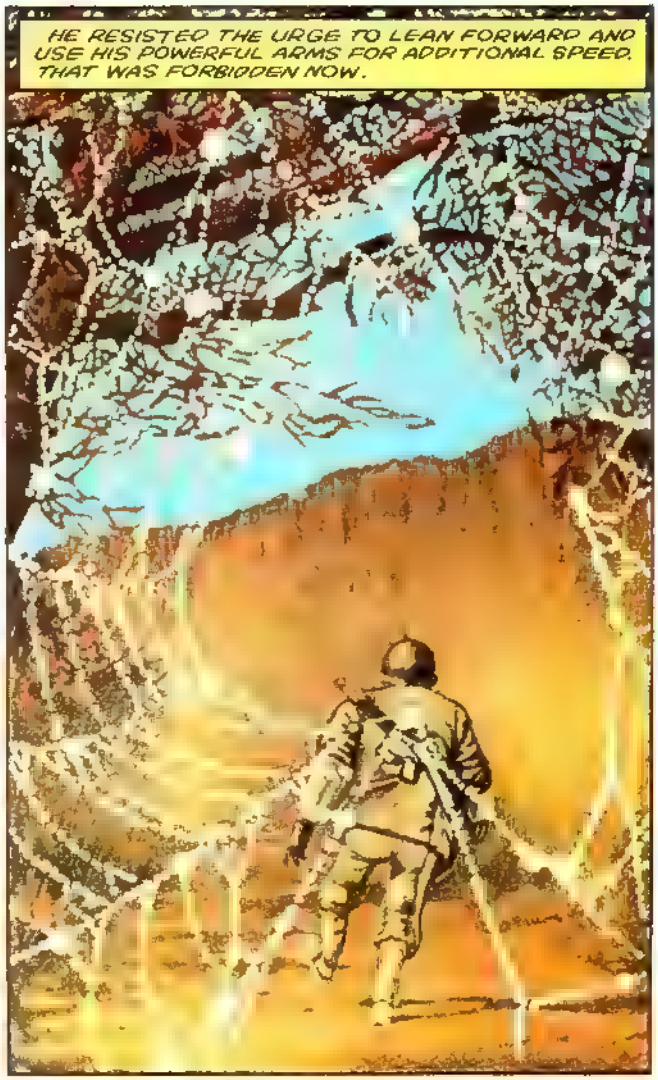

CHAPTER ONE:
THE SPY
HOWIE KNEW HOW IMPORTANT IT WAS FOR HIM TO CROSS THE FARMLAND BEFORE THE SUN BURNED OFF THE MORNING FOG. HE HURRIED ALONG THE DIRT ROAD ON A HALF RUN, HIS THICK, SHORT LEGS PUMPING. HIS BREATH MADE QUICK, HOLLOW SOUNDS INSIDE THE GAS MASK.

" HOWIE HOME!... HOWIE HOME! . HOWIE HOME!" HE THOUGHT TO HIMSELF (EACH TIME HIS LEFT FOOT STRUCK THE ROAD.


HE RESISTED THE URGE TO LEAN FORWARD AND USE HIS POWERFUL ARMS FOR ADDITIONAL SPEED. THAT WAS FORBIDDEN NOW.

HOWIE CLEARED THE LAST OF THE OPEN FIELDS JUST BEFORE NOON.
HE RAISED THE MASK AND FILLED HIS LUNGS WITH THE COLD, DRY AIR. HOWIE ONLY WORE THE MASK WHEN HE HAD GAS.
FROM HERE ON, THE ROADSIDE WOULD BE HEAVILY WOODED AND SAFE ALL THE WAY TO THE FACTORY.
THAT WAS THE RULE THAT OL' JOE HAD GIVEN HIM, AND IT WAS BEYOND QUESTION.
STILL, FOR THE LIFE OF HIM, HOWIE COULD NOT BEGIN TO UNDERSTAND WHAT HELP THE MASK WAS
FRA
HAP!
HE FARTED LONG AND HARD, THEN SNIFFED THE AIR. "CHOCOLATE" HE THOUGHT. NOT THAT HOWIE'S FARTS SMELLED LIKE CHOCOLATE. ON THE CONTRARY
IT WAS JUST THAT HE HAD REMINDED HIMSELF OF A STICK OF MAN'S CANDY THAT HE HAD FOUND THE DAY BEFORE. "WHO EAT CHOCOLATE?" HE SIGNED TO NO ONE IN PARTICULAR.
"HOWIE DO!" "HOWIE DO!" "HOWIE DO!" HE MOTIONED EMPHATICALLY.

JUST OFF THE ROAD, NEAR AN ABANDONED FARMHOUSE, HE SEATED HIMSELF ON AN ANCIENT WOODPILE AND PEELED THE CHOCOLATE STICK. THOUGH THE CANDY BAR WAS FAR OLDER THAN HOWIE, ITS PRESERVATIVES HAD SERVED IT WELL.
HE HAD THE TREAT ALMOST TO HIS LIPS WHEN HE HEARD THE BULLET STRIKE HIS CHEST THEN THUD INTO THE WOODPILE BEHIND HIM.
AS HE SLID FORWARD, THE HAND WITH THE CANDY FELL AWAY FROM HIM AS IF IN A DREAM.
THUMP
AS HE TUMBLED BACKWARD INTO THE ROTTED FIREWOOD, HE FINALLY HEARD THE LOUD REPORT OF A DISTANT RIFLE. HOWIE DUCKED HIS HEAD AT THE SOUND.
HE MADE ONE FAINT SMACKY LIP SOUND, THEN FELL FACE FORWARD INTO THE DRIED LEAVES. A SHORT TIME LATER, WHEN THE WARM AFTERNOON SUN EXPANDED THE GASES IN HIS INERT BODY...
HOWIE ISSUED HIS FINAL EARTHLY SOUND.....
FRAAAP!

CHAPTER TWO:
CAT'N'MOUSE
THAT NIGHT IN ONE OF THE BOOK CACHES...
OF MICE AND MEN
JOHN STEINBECK
AS FAR AS I'M CONCERNED, THIS STUFF IS JUST SO MUCH MUDDLED RAT SHIT.
I NEVER CEASE TO BE AMAZED THAT YOU LITTLE VERMIN PUT SUCH STOCK IN MAN'S BOOKS. OTHER THAN MAINTAINENCE MANUALS, I THINK IT'S ALL JUNK!
JUNK, INDEED!... EVERYTHING MAN WAS, MY DEAR FELICIA, AND EVERYTHING HE HOPED TO BECOME IS ALL RECORDED IN HIS BOOKS... THERE IS SO MUCH TO BE LEARNED..
JUNK? HOW DARE YOU!
CADBURY
YOU LEARN IT, THEN. MAN'S HISTORY'S DEAD!
LEARN IT I MUST... AND SO WILL YOU! THERE IS FAR MORE KNOWLEDGE IN BOOKS THAN JUST THE SERVICE AND REPAIR OF YOUR PRECIOUS SIDEARMS.

I'M TOO TIRED TO ARGUE. I'M GOING TO BED...
BUT AS FOR MY WELL-OILED, PROPERLY MAINTAINED GUN...
I SUGGEST YOU KEEP IT NEAR DURING YOUR TURN ON GUARD.
YOU SUGGEST, YOU SUGGEST! WELL, I SUGGEST YOU FINISH YOUR INSTRUCTION OR I WILL BE FORCED TO REPORT YOUR LACK OF COOPERATION TO THE COUNCIL.
YOU DO THAT, GUTTERMAN, AND THEY'LL FIND NOTHING BUT YOUR LITTLE, PINK EARS BY MEETING TIME... YOU BEST REMEM.....
SUDDENLY THE ROOM ERUPTED IN A BURST OF AUTOMATIC WEAPONS FIRE..
...THE ARGUMENT WAS DESTINED TO REMAIN FOREVER UNRESOLVED. THE TEACHER HAD BEEN STRUCK DOWN..

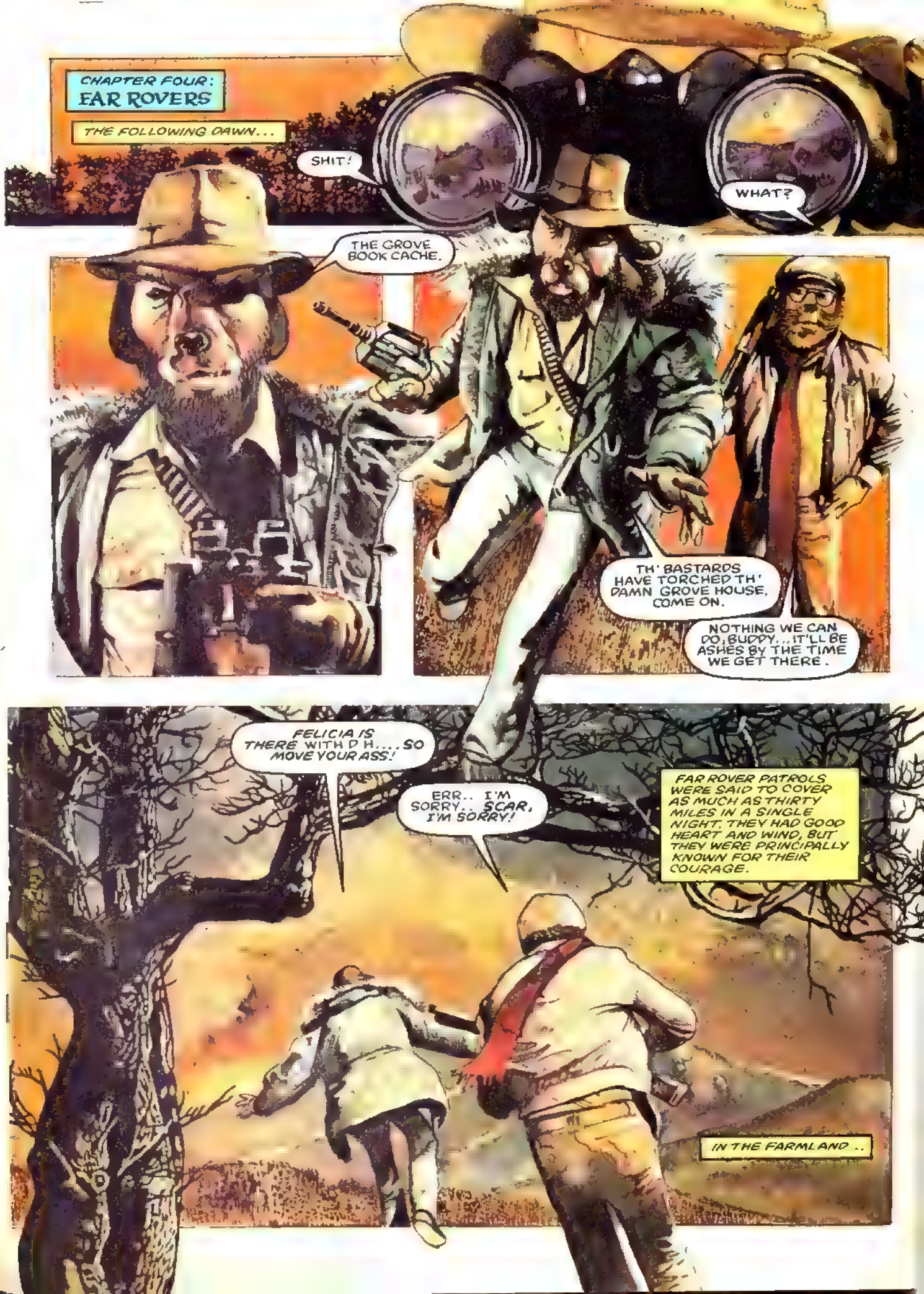
CHAPTER THREE:
THE FACTORY

THE ONLY KNOWN TALKING APE, OLD JOE, FIRST CAME TO OCCUPY THE FACTORY OVER TWENTY YEARS AGO. ALTHOUGH HE DIDN'T UNDERSTAND ITS EXACT FUNCTION AT FIRST, HE SENSED THAT THE BUILDING WAS A PLACE OF GREAT POWER HE AND HIS FOLLOWERS CHOSE TO PROTECT THE STRANGE STRUCTURE AND ITS EVEN STRANGER CONTENTS.

ONLY CRUDE TORCHES LIT A SMALL PORTION OF THE OUTPOST. MASSIVE TURBINES SAT FROZEN IN RUST, AND THAT NIGHT, THE BUILDING'S COLD AND EMPTY HALLS RESOUNDED WITH SCREAMS.

LET GO OF ME, YOU ASSHOLE!
TSK-TSK! MY DEAR, SUCH LANGUAGE IN FRONT OF YOUNG OMAR BESIDES, ONLY I GIVE ORDERS HERE!
THAT'S BECAUSE YOU'RE THE ONLY ONE OF THESE SHITHEELS THAT CAN SPEAK!
AH, YES, SPEECH .. IT IS QUITE A SPECIAL GIFT, DON'T YOU THINK? AND IT IS SO VERY NICE TO HAVE SOMEONE WHO CAN TALK BACK FOR COMPANY DO YOU READ AS WELL?
MORE BOOKS THAN YOU'VE THOUGHT TO BURN.
TECHNICAL BOOKS, I SHOULD HOPE! ... PERHAPS YOU HAVE SOME KNOWLEDGE OF LARGE ARMAMENTS OR HYDROELECTRICS. WE ARE NOT READERS AS SUCH, AND THAT WOULD BE USEFUL INDEED!
SORRY.

THAT IS REALLY QUITE A PITY.
I FEAR YOU LEAVE ME BUT A SINGLE PLEASURE...
THAT ..
CLICK
...OF SKINNING YOU ALIVE!
NO MATTER WHAT YOU DO, YOU AND YOUR GOONS WON'T LEARN A THING FROM ME, SO YOU MIGHT AS WELL GET ON WITH IT!
AH, BUT YOU ARE WRONG, MY DEAR. THERE IS A GREAT DEAL WE CAN LEARN FROM YOU...
PARTICULARLY IN THE AREA OF TANNING...SHALL WE BEGIN?
THEY BEGAN, AND THEY CONTINUED FOR FAR LONGER THAN ANYONE CARES TO THINK ABOUT.


CHAPTER FOUR:
FAR ROVERS
THE FOLLOWING DAWN...
SHIT!
WHAT?
THE GROVE BOOK CACHE.
TH' BASTARDS HAVE TORCHED TH' DAMN GROVE HOUSE, COME ON.
NOTHING WE CAN DO, BUDDY... IT'LL BE ASHES BY THE TIME WE GET THERE.
FELICIA IS THERE WITH D H.... SO MOVE YOUR ASS!
ERR.. I'M SORRY.. SCAR, I'M SORRY!
FAR ROVER PATROLS WERE SAID TO COVER AS MUCH AS THIRTY MILES IN A SINGLE NIGHT. THEY HAD GOOD HEART AND WIND, BUT THEY WERE PRINCIPALLY KNOWN FOR THEIR COURAGE.
IN THE FARMLAND ..

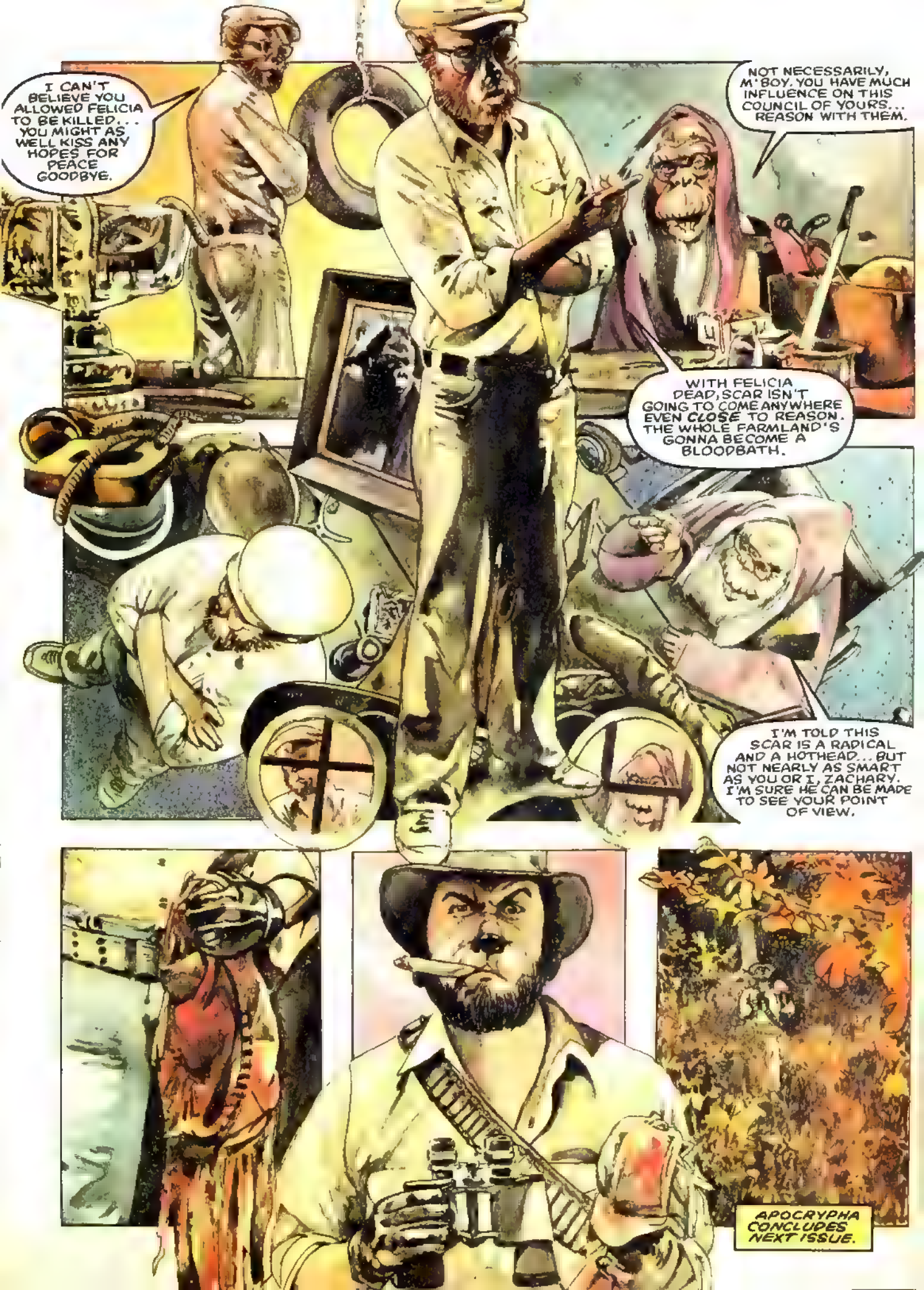
COURAGE WAS A COMMODITY IN GREAT DEMAND...
SCAR STARED INTO THE FLAMES FOR LONG MOMENTS BEFORE ZACK DARED TO SAY ANYTHING... FINALLY..
MAYBE THEY GOT OUT. YOU DON'T KNOW FOR SURE. THEY MIGHT HAVE GOTTEN OUT.
TH' APES DON'T NEVER LEAVE ANYTHIN' ALIVE OR STANDIN'...
DESPITE YOUR GRAMMAR, DEAR BOY, YOU ARE HALF RIGHT.
GUTTERMAN!
...THOUGH I *AM* ALIVE... I SHOULD THINK THAT ***STANDING*** IS TOTALLY OUT OF THE QUESTION. I'M AFRAID THAT THEY'VE TAKEN FELICIA WITH THEM.

LATER, AT THE CLINIC...
HOW'S HE DOIN'?
HE'S GOING TO LOSE A LEG. ALREADY LOST A LOT OF BLOOD. I DON'T KNOW.
I JUST DON'T KNOW.
SEE IF YOU CAN PICK UP THEIR TRAIL. I'LL GET D.H. T'CHARLIE AND CATCH UP T'YA.
RIGHT I'M ON MY WAY.
YOU'LL PATCH HIM UP OK, DOC. YOU ALWAYS DO.
SURE, I TREAT DISEASES WITH DRUGS THAT ARE SO OLD, I DON'T EVEN KNOW IF THEY'RE POTENT. I'VE GOT A MAKE-SHIFT HOSPITAL FILLED WITH EQUIPMENT THAT BARELY WORKS AND A GROUP OF GUN CRAZY RADICALS TRYING TO BLOW LARGE CALIBER HOLES IN ONE ANOTHER IT'S A GREAT JOB.
JUS' LIKE TH' REST OF US, YOU'RE PART OF TH' WAR.
I WOULD REMIND YOU THAT UNLESS TWO THIRDS OF THE COUNCIL VOTE FOR WAR... WE ARE AT PEACE WITH THE APES. A FACT YOU ROVERS ALWAYS SEEM TO OVERLOOK!
GUTTERMAN ALWAYS VOTED FOR PEACE. NOW TH' POOR BASTARD'S GONNA HAVE TA' IMPROVE IF HE EVEN HOPES TA' MAKE CRIPPLE.

LOOK, SCAR, I KNOW YOU'RE WORRIED ABOUT THE GIRL ..BUT I'M SURE...
FELICIA CAN TAKE CARE OF HERSELF I'M MORE WORRIED ABOUT HOW TH' HELL TH' APES ALWAYS KNOW JUST WHERE TH' BOYS AND ME AIN'T. MIND IF I SMOKE?
YOU KNOW THAT I MIND' NOT THAT MY OBJECTIONS EVER STOP YOU, BUT WHILE WE'RE ON THE SUBJECT, IF FELICIA DOESN'T SHOW UP BY TONIGHT FOR THE COUNCIL VOTE DO YOU HAVE ANY OBJECTION TO MANDY TAKING HER SISTER'S PLACE?
YOU KNOW THAT I DO! TH' LAST THING WE NEED IS ANOTHER PEACIFIER, WHAT WITH YOU, GUTTERMAN AND ZACK... BUT GO AHEAD, MY OBJECTIONS DON'T NEVER STOP YOU, EITHER.
YOU SURE YOU AIN'T GOT A MATCH?
CHAPTER FIVE: THE ALLIANCE
NOT ALL THAT FAR AWAY, THE BRISK MORNING BECAME RATHER A HOT INDIAN SUMMER DAY, AND WHILE THE FAST PURSUIT HAD NOT TIRED ZACK...

...IT HAD MANAGED TO MAKE HIM A LITTLE BIT THIRSTY.....
.....AND A LOT MORE CARELESS.
HUH?
OOMFT!
DAMN YOU, OMAR, YOU NEARLY BROKE MY NECK WHY DO YOU ALWAYS DO THAT, EVEN WHEN YOU KNOW IT'S ME? NEVER MIND, I'VE GOT BUSINESS WITH OLD JOE WHERE IS HE?
AFTER GIVING THE SIGN MEANING "SIMPLE ENOUGH MISTAKE" OMAR ESCORTED HIS GUEST TO THE FACTORY.

ZACHARY, MY FRIEND, MY COMPANY LEADERS AND I WERE JUST HAVING LUNCH. WILL YOU JOIN US?
GET RID OF 'EM, OMAR, TOO. I NEED TO TALK JUST TO YOU!
VERY WELL, MY BOY, I UNDERSTAND. YOU HAVE INFORMATION FOR THESE OLD EARS ONLY.. INDEED, LEAVE US...
AS THE DINING HALL CLEARED...
THIS TIME I'M HERE FOR INFORMATION. WHAT HAVE YOUR TROOPS DONE WITH THE GIRL THEY TOOK LAST NIGHT?
DEAD, I'M AFRAID. KILLED WHILE TRYING TO ESCAPE. I GAVE SPECIFIC ORDERS THAT SHE WAS NOT TO BE...
DEAD!
...THAT SHE WAS NOT TO BE HARMED, BUT THEN MY FORCES LACK DISCIPLINE, AS YOU KNOW!


I CAN'T BELIEVE YOU ALLOWED FELICIA TO BE KILLED... YOU MIGHT AS WELL KISS ANY HOPES FOR PEACE GOODBYE.
NOT NECESSARILY, M'BOY. YOU HAVE MUCH INFLUENCE ON THIS COUNCIL OF YOURS... REASON WITH THEM.
WITH FELICIA DEAD, SCAR ISN'T GOING TO COME ANYWHERE EVEN CLOSE TO REASON. THE WHOLE FARMLAND'S GONNA BECOME A BLOODBATH.
I'M TOLD THIS SCAR IS A RADICAL AND A HOTHEAD... BUT NOT NEARLY AS SMART AS YOU OR I, ZACHARY. I'M SURE HE CAN BE MADE TO SEE YOUR POINT OF VIEW.
APOCRYPHA CONCLUDES NEXT ISSUE.

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EEHHHRR...?
RAHRR!!
IT'S TERRIBLE... WHAT WILL BECOME OF US?
IF ANYONE KNOWS HOW TO HANDLE THIS MATTER, IT'LL BE OUR MAYOR...
I'M TELLING YOU MA'AM, IT'S TRUE... NOT ONLY IS THAT HUGE, TERRIBLE OGRE STILL OUTSIDE OF TOWN,
BUT NOW THERE'S ANOTHER ONE APPROACHIN' AS WELL!
OH, MERCY ON US!
MY DEAR CITIZENS, YOU MUST NOT DESPAIR.. I KNOW THE FUTURE OF OUR LITTLE VILLAGE LOOKS BLEAK, WITH TWO MAN-EATING MONSTERS HERE ON OUR VERY DOORSTEPS...
... BUT I HAVE HIT UPON A PLAN.

I CANNOT LET THIS VILLAGE SUFFER THEIR DREADFUL WRATH .. AND SO, THOUGH IT PAINS A FATHER'S HEART TO DO SO... I WILL SACRIFICE MY OWN DEAR DAUGHTER TO THEIR HUNGER
MINERVA, MY CHILD. COME FORWARD. .

OH, THE POOR, POOR LASS.
SO YOUNG. . SO FAIR.
SO BRAVE.

FAREWELL, MY DARLING,. DON'T LOOK BACK. ONCE YOU GO. JUST KNOW THAT, BY YOUR DEATH, YOU SHALL ASSUAGE THE IRE OF TWO CREATURES WHO MIGHT OTHER WISE MAKE AN END TO ALL OF US.
WE... I... SHALL NEVER FORGET YOU.

OH, FINE! AND I GUESS THAT'S SUPPOSED TO BE OF SOME COMFORT TO ME?
IT'S NO BED OF ROSES BEING THE SACRIFICIAL VIRGIN, YOU KNOW. AND I DIDN'T EXACTLY VOLUNTEER FOR THIS JOB, EITHER.

BUT I'M THE MAYOR'S DAUGHTER, AND GOOD OLD DADDY FIGURED HE COULD GET ME OFF HIS HANDS AND WIN A FEW EXTRA VOTES AND GOOD-WILL BY COMING UP WITH THIS SCHEME.
I MEAN, I ASK YOU, WOULD YOU DO SOMETHING LIKE THIS TO YOUR DAUGHTER?
IF SHE HAD A MOUTH ON HER LIKE YOURS, DEFINITELY.

NOW, NOW, MINERVA... A FEW TEARS AT PARTING ARE TO BE EXPECTED... BUT TRY TO GET HOLD OF YOURSELF. THINK OF THE PEACE WE SHALL ALL ENJOY, ONCE YOU ARE GONE.
ONE MORE CRACK LIKE THAT, AND I'M STAYING RIGHT WHERE I--
--OW!
OW! HEY, CUT IT OUT!
ALL RIGHT, ALL RIGHT, I'M GOING. I NEVER LIKED THIS TOWN ANYWAY.
OOAARGH!
EH?
OOAARGH?
HRUF HRUF HRUF HRUF!

HEY! HEY, I'M TALKING TO YOU! I WANT TO KNOW JUST WHO THE PAIR OF YOU THINK YOU ARE, TO COME INTO MY VILLAGE, AND TERRORIZE PEOPLE, AND EAT ME!
YOU REALLY HAVE A NERVE.
EAT YOU? I BEG YOUR PARDON, BUT DID YOU SAY I'M SUPPOSED TO EAT YOU?
IF YOU'LL EXCUSE MY SAYING SO, THAT'S A PERFECTLY REVOLTING SUGGESTION.
BUT I... BUT... BUT WE THOUGHT...
I REALLY CANNOT ANSWER FOR YOUR LOCAL OGRE'S INTENTIONS, HOWEVER I ASSURE YOU THAT AS SOON AS I CAN CONVINCE THE FELLOW TO STEP ASIDE, I'LL BE ON MY--!
I THINK YOU'D BETTER DUCK...

AARH!
EEEK!
WHA-WHAT ARE THEY DOING?
WHY DON'T THEY JUST SETTLE DOWN AND EAT HER?
OH, GOLLY... IT LOOKS LIKE THE ONE WHO'S ON MY SIDE MIGHT BE LOSING...

I CAN'T LET THAT HAPPEN. MAYBE A POKE WITH A SHARP STICK WILL .
MRAHW...?
UH... CAN'T YOU TAKE A LITTLE JOKE ?
!
HEY! GREAT ! YOU KILLED HIM, AND..
... UH - OK

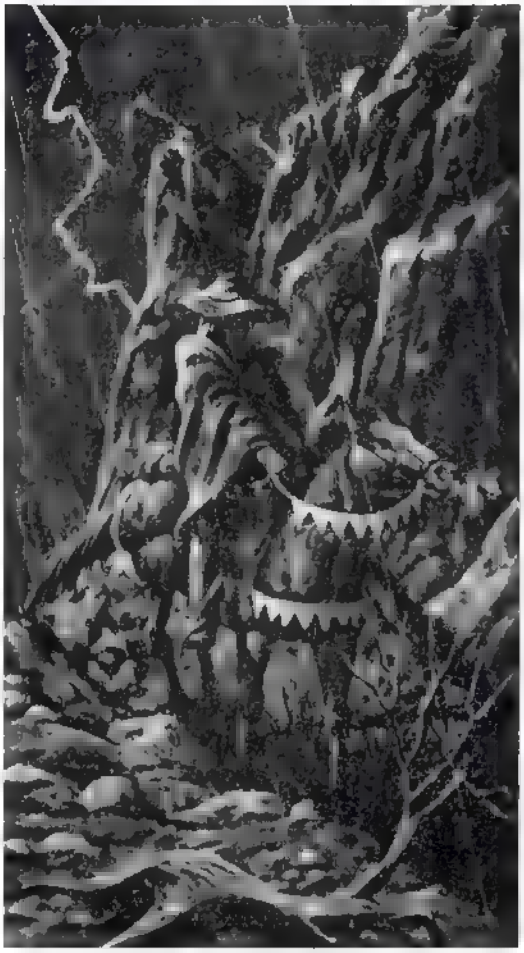
IT LOOKS LIKE MINERVA HAS FORMED AN ALLIANCE WITH ONE OF THE CREATURES.. IF SHE SHOULD LEAD IT BACK TO THE VILLAGE, WHAT WILL BECOME OF US ?
YOU'RE THE MAYOR! YOU MUST THINK OF SOME WAY OF SAVING US!
N-NONSENSE! MY DAUGHTER UNDERSTOOD OUR PLIGHT! SHE WOULD NEVER BE SO VENGEFUL AS TO... TO. TO..
PERHAPS IF WE ALL MOVED TO ANOTHER PART OF THE COUNTRY ?
MISS? OH, MISS? ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?
I WILL BE... ONCE YOU GET THAT CARCASS OFF ME..
THANK YOU. BY THE WAY... IT ISN'T "MISS", IT'S MINERVA
A PLEASURE TO MAKE YOUR ACQUAINTANCE.
AND MY NAME IS ALISTAIR. WOULD YOU LIKE ME TO ESCORT YOU BACK TO YOUR HOME?
ARE YOU KIDDING? WHAT WOULD I WANT TO GO BACK THERE FOR? THEY TRIED TO SACRIFICE ME!
OH. OH, I SEE.
THEN... PERHAPS YOU'D CARE TO ACCOMPANY ME ON MY TRAVELS. IT WILL BE DARK SOON, SO WE'D BETTER LEAVE NOW, IF WE'RE GOING TO FIND AN INN.
AN INN? DO YOU KNOW OF ANY INNS WITH BEDS LARGE ENOUGH TO FIT YOU ?
DO YOU KNOW OF ANY INN-KEEPER BRAVE ENOUGH TO TURN ME AWAY IF I SAY WE WANT LODGINGS?
NO.

What is this Darkness, this pall, this consumate Evil pervading mind and body...even as it fills the now forsaken corridors and chambers of Amplestone? Aye, there and beyond...overspreading the landscapes and villages of the First Dominion itself.

Whence comes this Awfulness of Spirit, this visible, palpable Miasma of Wickedness that permeates my heart and my home...and has taken possession of the soul of my beloved Lord and brought me to this bleak pass in my own wretched existence?

Is it the Spawn of Treachery and Murder and Corruption that has plagued Amplestone since the abrupt, inexplicable disappearance of the old Lord three years past? Or are all those Evils merely the obvious manifestations of some all-encompassing Unholy Presence now embodied in this Tainted Gloom that Prince Waxwroth has, in his desperation, conjured up?

And is the Prince indeed Master of this Horror he evoked or as much its Prisoner as am I of this squalid, forgotten cell? Who then is the more captive? He whose heritage and birthright were Freedom and Power... or one whose own stunted and twisted body has been and shall forever remain a more confining and inescapable Gaol than ever stones or bars could make?



But now...and when...and why did we *lose* what Freedoms we had, he or I? Did they simply slip away through ignorance and apathy...or were they willfully *forfeited* in the furtherance of selfish, personal desire?

If the Fear and Suspicion engendered by the circumstances of the old Lord's disappearance set the stage for this Drama of Death so recently played out in Amplestone, then most certainly the Tragedy's Last Act began just three months ago... with the arrival of an itinerant journeyer...

TOAD'S WART
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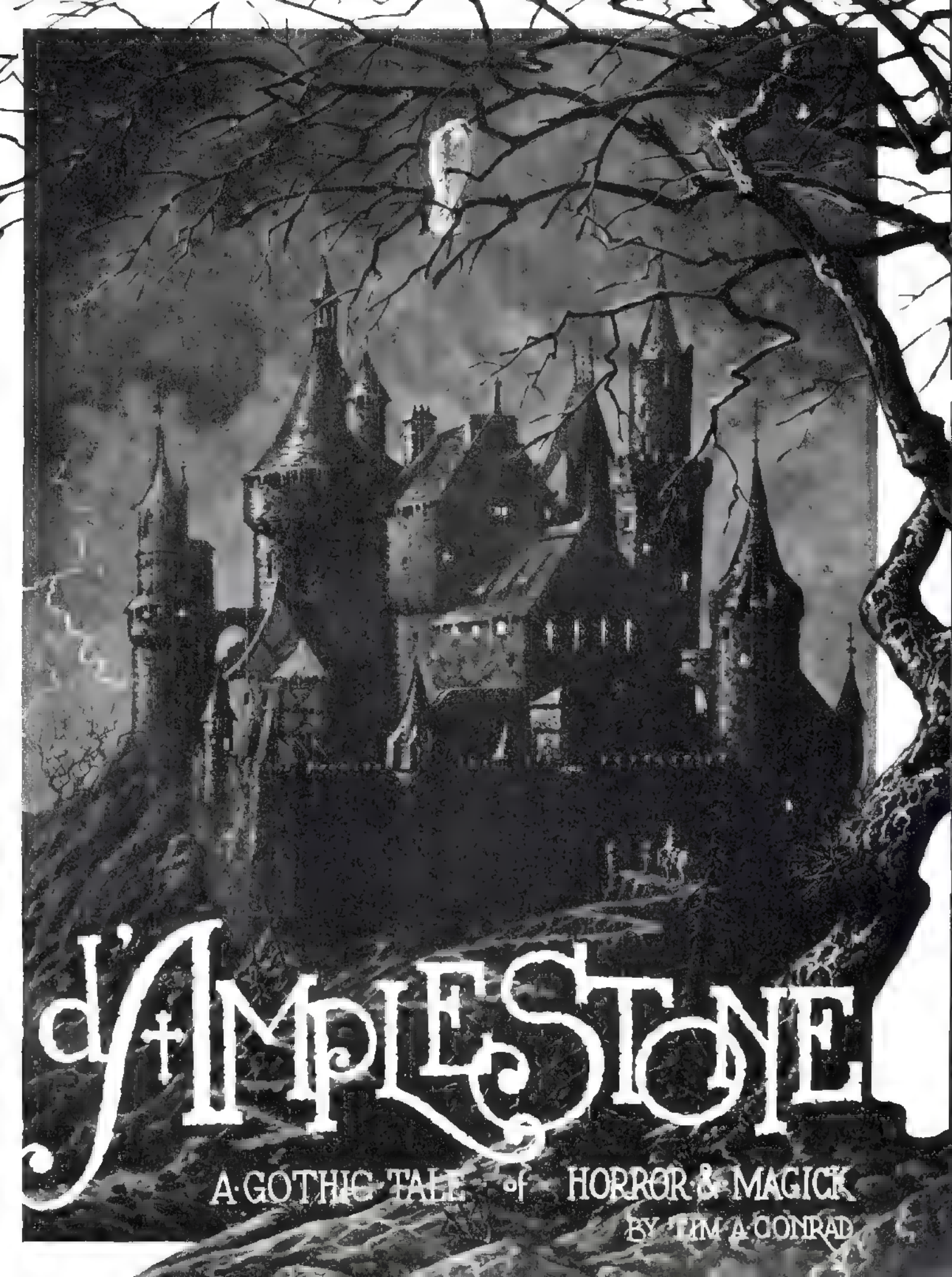

d'AMPLESTONE
A GOTHIC TALE of HORROR & MAGICK
BY TIM A CONRAD

HO! UPON WHAT CAUSE ARE YOU COME?
I HUMBLY REQUEST BRIEF AUDIENCE WITH YOUR NOBLE LORD WAXWROTH. AND ASSUMING THE HOSPITALITY OF THE MANOR EXCEEDS THAT OF THE SURROUNDING PROVINCE—
—RELIEF FROM THIS GELID DOWN-POUR.
WELL, YOUNG FELLOW, WHO SHALL I SAY YOU ARE?
A DECORATOR OF WALLS AND PAINTER OF PORTRAITS, GOOD SIR—
--HAVING HEARD SUCH SERVICES MAY BE OF USE IN AMPLESTONE.
RUMOR--OR SOMETHING--HAS LED YOU TRUE.
COME! CAPTAIN FLURRY WILL SEE TO YOUR STEED.
Bitterburr, my Lord's Counselor, behaved for all the world as if he had expected this stranger... as if Waxwroth expected him...
...and this acceptance made me wonder. I followed as he led the wet and weary traveller to the Hall of the Oak.

Amplestone had received no visitors in all the time since the old Lord had ridden off alone and without explanation, equipped for a journey of no great extent, never to be heard from again.

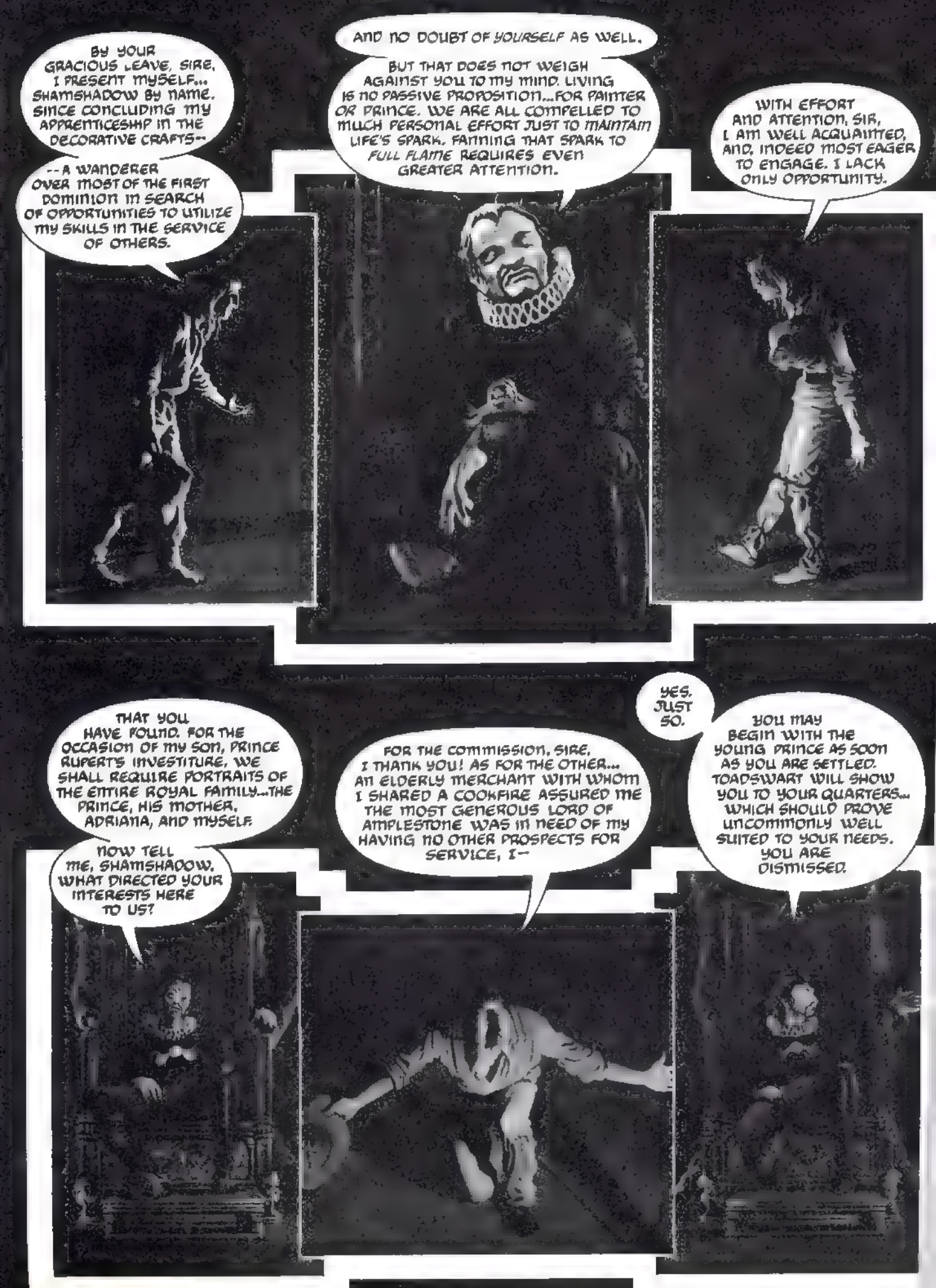
Prince Waxwroth became convinced that the King of the First Dominion—covetous of Amplestone Province's natural and strategic advantages—had somehow enticed his father to venture out unprotected for a clandestine rendezvous with Treachery and Death, the first step in a scheme to annex this region without arousing the ire of the other Provinces.

By the end of two years, with no clue to the old Lord's fate, nor tangible evidence of the King's complicity, Waxwroth, as hereditary and legal Regent, had implemented programs of political and military oppression designed to thwart any maneuverings by the First Dominion's ruler. He had also implemented excessive taxation to support a secret defense plan, somehow involving the acquisition of rare expensive books and esoteric instruments, along with the construction of an elaborate chamber within the very bowels of Amplestone.

This taxation had rendered the peasants destitute and the courtiers and lesser Nobles suspicious and angry. Waxwroth's spies and tax collectors left in their wakes the dessicated corpses of strangled Hospitality and assassinated Trust. Strangers were no longer welcome in Amplestone Province.

Yet, here was one being led by Counselor Bitterburr into that hall where generation after generation of Amplestone Lords held court...

...as this night, 'neath the overhanging boughs of the hoary tree around which the manor's original bastions were raised, did my liege Waxwroth.


BY YOUR GRACIOUS LEAVE, SIRE, I PRESENT MYSELF... SHAMSHADOW BY NAME. SINCE CONCLUDING MY APPRENTICESHIP IN THE DECORATIVE CRAFTS--
--A WANDERER OVER MOST OF THE FIRST DOMINION IN SEARCH OF OPPORTUNITIES TO UTILIZE MY SKILLS IN THE SERVICE OF OTHERS.
AND NO DOUBT OF YOURSELF AS WELL.
BUT THAT DOES NOT WEIGH AGAINST YOU TO MY MIND. LIVING IS NO PASSIVE PROPOSITION...FOR PAINTER OR PRINCE. WE ARE ALL COMPELLED TO MUCH PERSONAL EFFORT JUST TO MAINTAIN LIFE'S SPARK. FANNING THAT SPARK TO FULL FLAME REQUIRES EVEN GREATER ATTENTION.
WITH EFFORT AND ATTENTION, SIR, I AM WELL ACQUAINTED, AND, INDEED MOST EAGER TO ENGAGE. I LACK ONLY OPPORTUNITY.
THAT YOU HAVE FOUND. FOR THE OCCASION OF MY SON, PRINCE RUPERT'S INVESTITURE, WE SHALL REQUIRE PORTRAITS OF THE ENTIRE ROYAL FAMILY...THE PRINCE, HIS MOTHER, ADRIANA, AND MYSELF.
NOW TELL ME, SHAMSHADOW, WHAT DIRECTED YOUR INTERESTS HERE TO US?
FOR THE COMMISSION, SIRE, I THANK YOU! AS FOR THE OTHER... AN ELDERLY MERCHANT WITH WHOM I SHARED A COOKFIRE ASSURED ME THE MOST GENEROUS LORD OF AMPLESTONE WAS IN NEED OF MY HAVING NO OTHER PROSPECTS FOR SERVICE, I--
YES. JUST SO.
YOU MAY BEGIN WITH THE YOUNG PRINCE AS SOON AS YOU ARE SETTLED. TOADSWART WILL SHOW YOU TO YOUR QUARTERS... WHICH SHOULD PROVE UNCOMMONLY WELL SUITED TO YOUR NEEDS. YOU ARE DISMISSED.

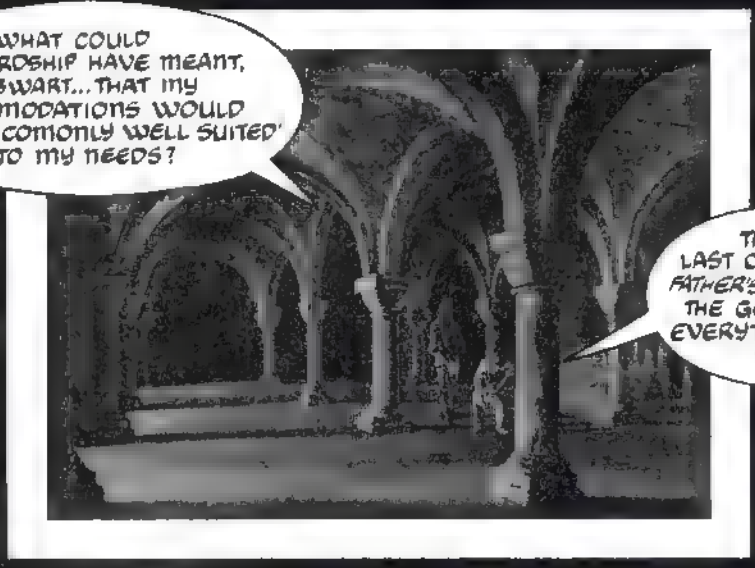
As I led Shamshadow through the the capricious environs of Amplestone, I wondered anew at the artist's timely arrival and ready acceptance.

It was then, I think, when I should have begun to suspect some...some connection between this and the rather odd and curious state of affairs in the manor...

THROUGHOUT ALL OF THE FIRST DOMINION, MASTER TOADSWART, THEY SPEAK OF THE GRANDEUR OF AMPLESTONE ... THAT IT EVEN RIVALS THE PALACE OF THE KING HIMSELF.
I'VE NEVER BEEN TO THE CAPITOL.

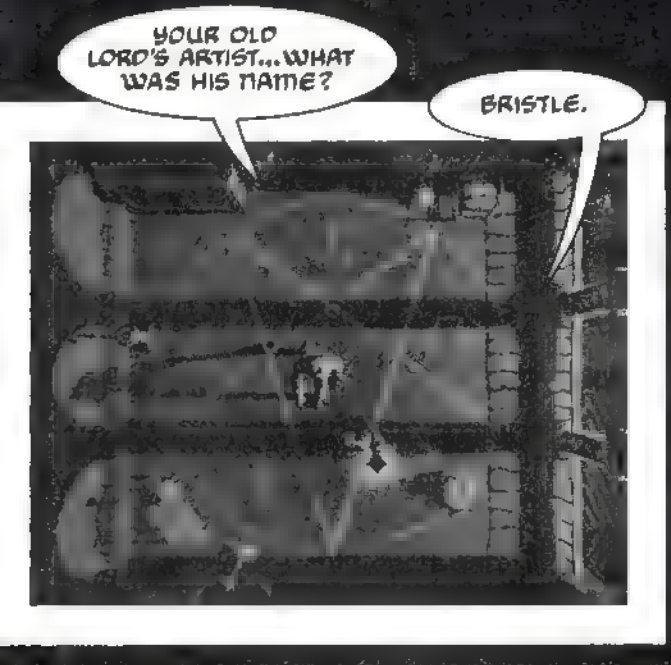
There was Bitterburr's uncharacteristic antipathy to the young Prince's coming investiture, seemingly since--even while proclaiming Rupert legal heir--it would validate Waxwroth as Lord of Amplestone and presume the death of the old Lord...to whom Bitterburr had also been not only Counselor but, even more, friend.

But in the matter of the investiture, Waxwroth could not be denied.


WHAT COULD HIS LORDSHIP HAVE MEANT, TOADSWART... THAT MY ACCOMODATIONS WOULD BE "UNCOMONLY WELL SUITED" TO MY NEEDS?
THEY WERE LAST OCCUPIED BY HIS FATHER'S COURT PAINTER. THE GENTLEMAN LEFT EVERYTHING BEHIND WHEN HE... LEFT.

To Bitterburr's great annoyance, my Lord charged *him* with organizing the investiture ceremony, while Waxwroth's own days were increasingly spent in his library, pouring intently over the arcane volumes he had acquired.

And when not in the library, Waxwroth would be secreted in subterranean chambers, engaged long into the darkness of night in some absolutely mysterious endeavors.



But what had all this to do with Shamshadow? And Bristle... was his sorry fate yet another piece of some larger puzzle of which each of these circumstances were but a piece?

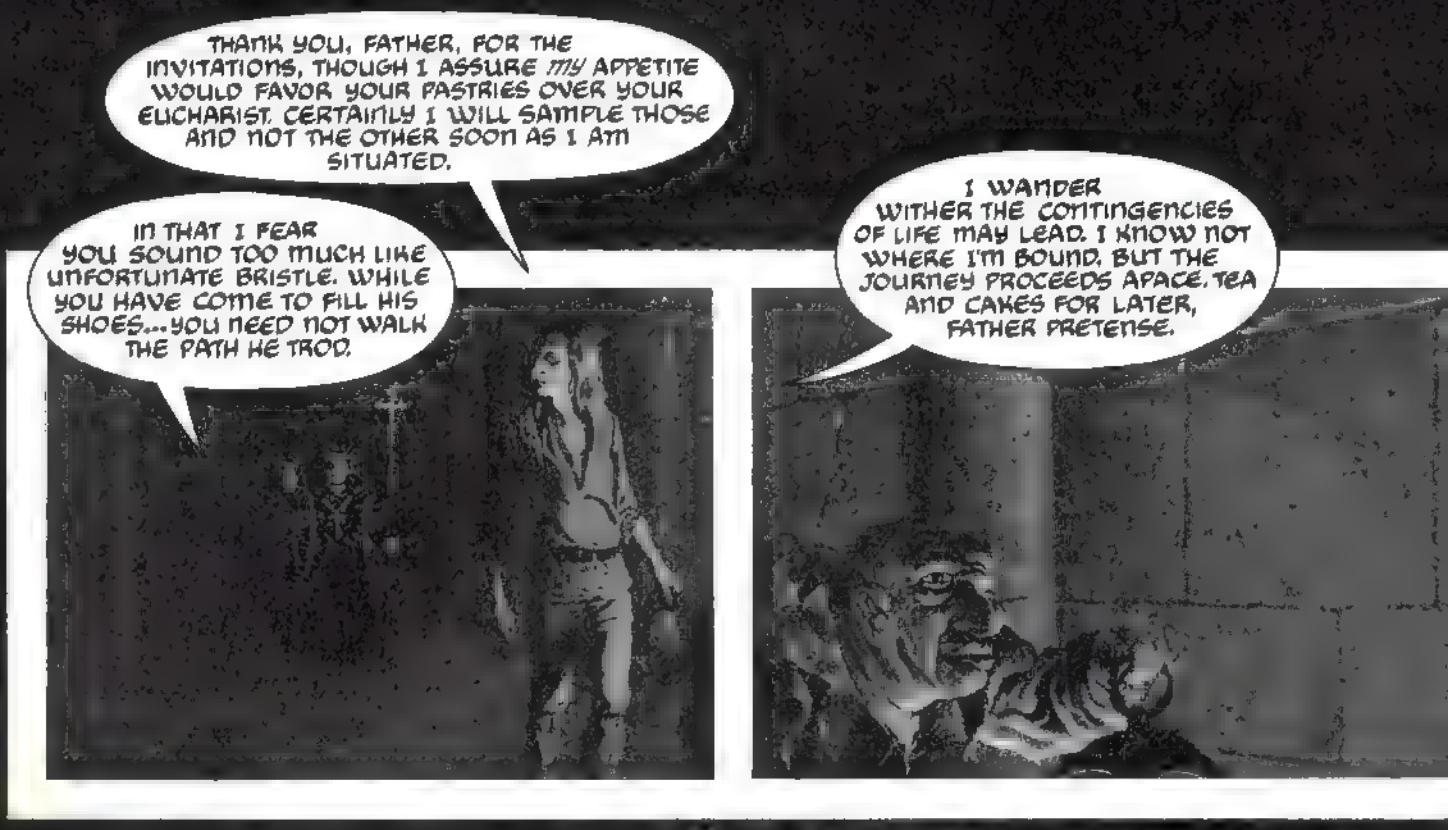
But even as I began tentatively to formulate these questions--long before the full horror of the answers would become clear--we came to the chapel beyond which lay Bristle's former quarters... where, as I full well expected, our passage was anxiously awaited by one whose ears were more keenly tuned to gossip than to God...

...one whose understanding and awareness were as vast as all the world between the rectory and the kitchens.

Still, he was a well meaning if a bit simple, soul and I owed him gratitude at least. It was he who taught me letters. I fear I disappointed him greatly when this facility led me to question more than accept his obsessive devotion to ritual.

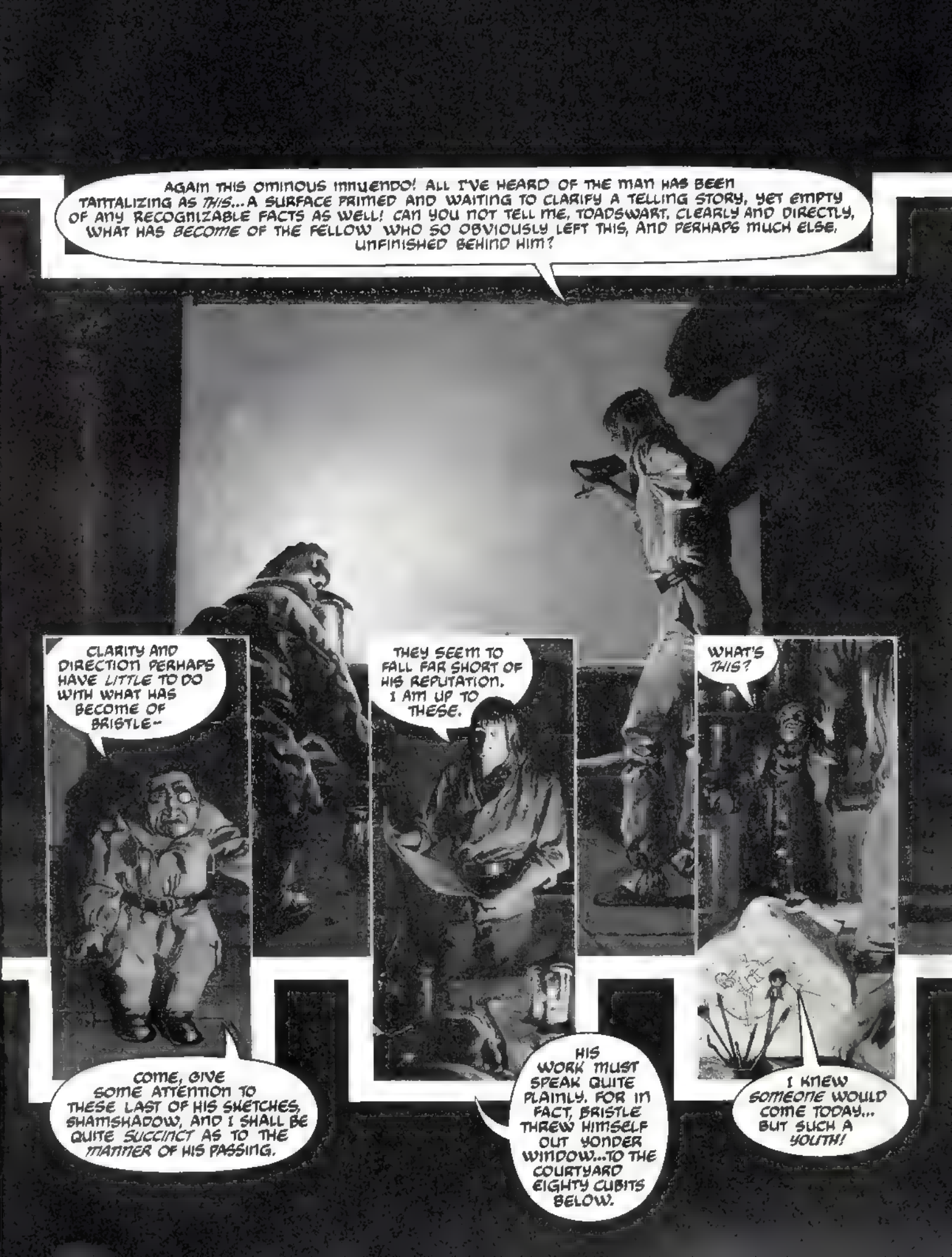
-I AM ONLY SHAMSHADOW
ONLY SHAMSHADOW? BY HEAVEN, YOU LOOK TRUTHFULLY REAL AND SOLID TO THESE ANCIENT EYES. CERTAINLY SUBSTANTIAL ENOUGH TO TAKE MASS ON SUNDAY...OR TEA AND CAKES WITH AN OLD PRIEST ON WHATEVER DAY YOU LIKE.

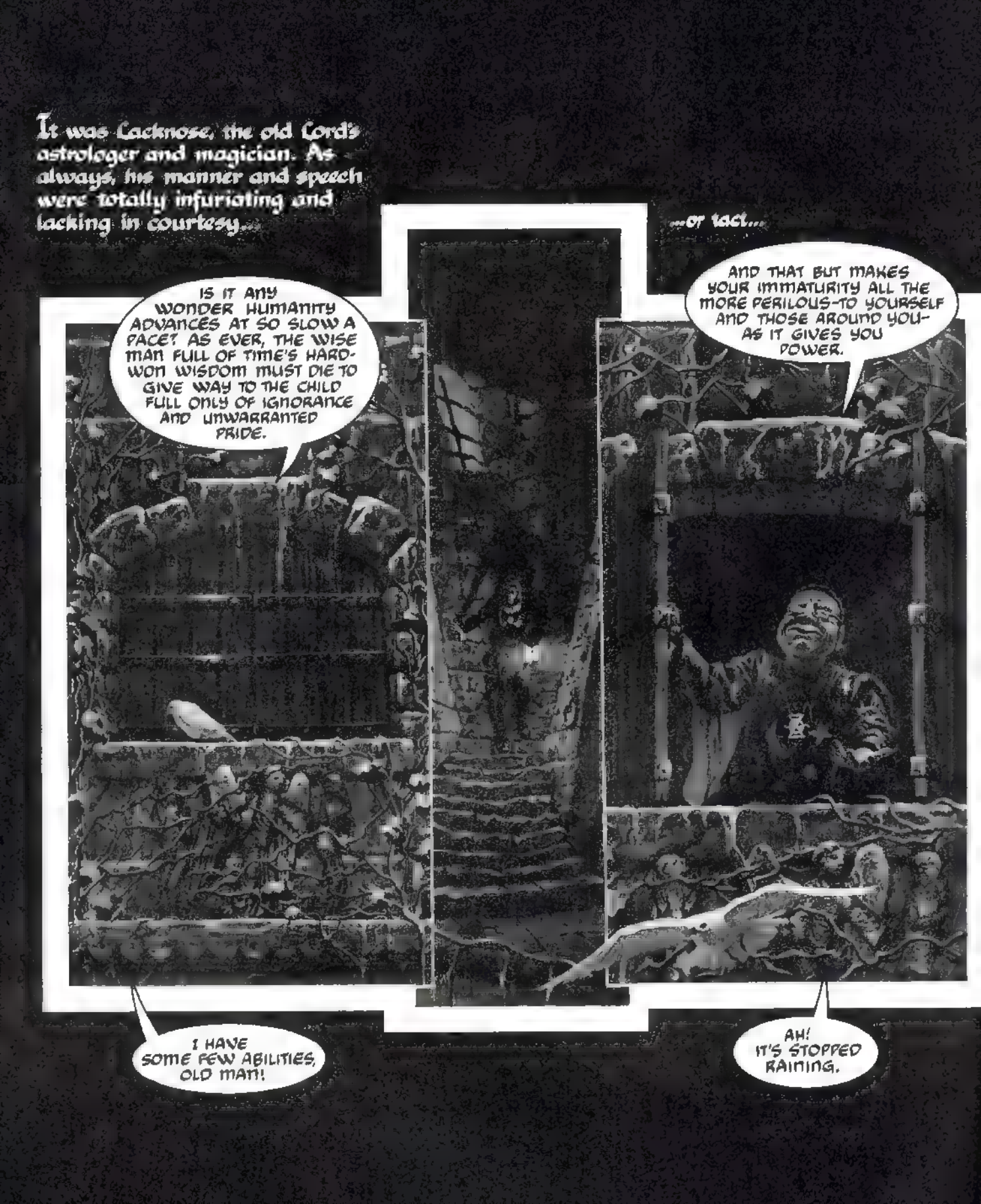
Poor Father Pretense. The deeper tenets of his convictions, like the broader aspects of worldly life, were beyond the range of his faculties. He buried his incomprehension of the one, and his terror of the other, 'neath all available layers of clerical dogma. But whatever he lacked in imagination was balanced by his sincerity and devotion.


THANK YOU, FATHER, FOR THE INVITATIONS, THOUGH I ASSURE *my* APPETITE WOULD FAVOR YOUR PASTRIES OVER YOUR EUCHARIST. CERTAINLY I WILL SAMPLE THOSE AND NOT THE OTHER SOON AS I AM SITUATED.
IN THAT I FEAR YOU SOUND TOO MUCH LIKE UNFORTUNATE BRISTLE. WHILE YOU HAVE COME TO FILL HIS SHOES...YOU NEED NOT WALK THE PATH HE TROD.
I WANDER WITHER THE CONTINGENCIES OF LIFE MAY LEAD. I KNOW NOT WHERE I'M BOUND, BUT THE JOURNEY PROCEEDS APACE. TEA AND CAKES FOR LATER, FATHER PRETENSE.

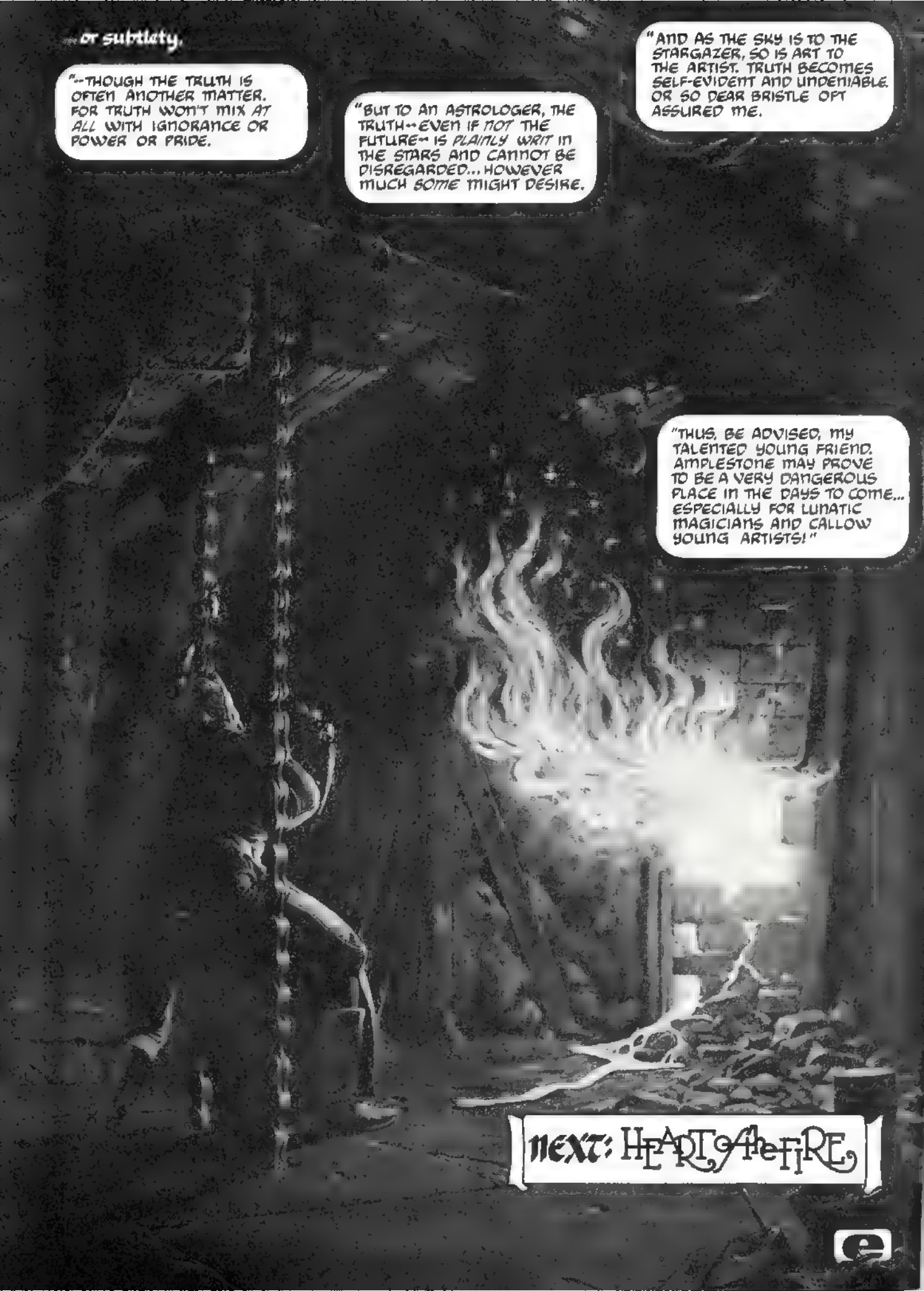
I wonder now if anyone--even Waxwroth--had any more knowledge or control at that time over the inexorable Road to Damnation we were all advancing upon than Shamshad Shamshadow claimed for himself?

But I did not wonder *then* as, finally, we came to Bristle's erstwhile abode.


AGAIN THIS OMINOUS INNUENDO! ALL I'VE HEARD OF THE MAN HAS BEEN TANTALIZING AS *THIS*... A SURFACE PRIMED AND WAITING TO CLARIFY A TELLING STORY, YET EMPTY OF ANY RECOGNIZABLE FACTS AS WELL! CAN YOU NOT TELL ME, TOADSWART, CLEARLY AND DIRECTLY, WHAT HAS *BECOME* OF THE FELLOW WHO SO OBVIOUSLY LEFT THIS, AND PERHAPS MUCH ELSE, UNFINISHED BEHIND HIM?
CLARITY AND DIRECTION PERHAPS HAVE *LITTLE* TO DO WITH WHAT HAS BECOME OF BRISTLE--
COME, GIVE SOME ATTENTION TO THESE LAST OF HIS SKETCHES, SHAMSHADOW, AND I SHALL BE QUITE *SUCCINCT* AS TO THE *MANNER* OF HIS PASSING.
THEY SEEM TO FALL FAR SHORT OF HIS REPUTATION. I AM UP TO THESE.
HIS WORK MUST SPEAK QUITE PLAINLY. FOR IN FACT, BRISTLE THREW HIMSELF OUT YONDER WINDOW...TO THE COURTYARD EIGHTY CUBITS BELOW.
WHAT'S *THIS*?
I KNEW *SOMEONE* WOULD COME TODAY... BUT SUCH A *YOUTH*!


It was Lacknose, the old Lord's astrologer and magician. As always, his manner and speech were totally infuriating and lacking in courtesy...
...or tact...
IS IT ANY WONDER HUMANITY ADVANCES AT SO SLOW A PACE? AS EVER, THE WISE MAN FULL OF TIME'S HARD-WON WISDOM MUST DIE TO GIVE WAY TO THE CHILD FULL ONLY OF IGNORANCE AND UNWARRANTED PRIDE.
AND THAT BUT MAKES YOUR IMMATURITY ALL THE MORE PERILOUS-TO YOURSELF AND THOSE AROUND YOU-AS IT GIVES YOU POWER.
I HAVE SOME FEW ABILITIES, OLD MAN!
AH! IT'S STOPPED RAINING.

...if not in honesty...
YES...IGNORANCE AND POWER! AN EXTREMELY VOLATILE MIX...ALL TOO READILY IGNITED BY PRIDE! INDEED, MY DEAR FRIEND BRISTLE WAS *MURDERED* BY JUST SUCH A BLAST
MURDERED?! BUT...TOADSWART TOLD ME THAT HE KILLED *HIMSELF!*
AS WAXWROTH DESIRES, SO BITTERBURR MUST CONTEND, AND ALL IN AMPLESTONE MUST BELIEVE--


...or subtlety.
"--THOUGH THE TRUTH IS OFTEN ANOTHER MATTER. FOR TRUTH WON'T MIX AT ALL WITH IGNORANCE OR POWER OR PRIDE.
"BUT TO AN ASTROLOGER, THE TRUTH--EVEN IF NOT THE FUTURE--IS PLAINLY WRIT IN THE STARS AND CANNOT BE DISREGARDED... HOWEVER MUCH SOME MIGHT DESIRE.
"AND AS THE SKY IS TO THE STARGAZER, SO IS ART TO THE ARTIST. TRUTH BECOMES SELF-EVIDENT AND UNDENIABLE. OR SO DEAR BRISTLE OFT ASSURED ME.
"THUS, BE ADVISED, MY TALENTED YOUNG FRIEND. AMPLESTONE MAY PROVE TO BE A VERY DANGEROUS PLACE IN THE DAYS TO COME... ESPECIALLY FOR LUNATIC MAGICIANS AND CALLOW YOUNG ARTISTS!"
NEXT: HEART OF THE FIRE

O SMOKING

THE BRIDGE IS OFF LIMITS! WHO GAVE YOU MEN THE AUTHORITY ?
WE'RE RUNNING THE SHOW NOW, ARCHBISHOP! WE'RE GOING HOME!

HOW DARE YOU! THIS IS NOT MUTINY THIS IS PIRACY
THE MATTER IS OUT OF YOUR HANDS, SIR. MAYBE YOU WOULD BE OF MORE USE IN THE CHAPEL!

YOU WILL REGRET THIS

JOSHUA

ST. CATHERINES HAD BEEN CONSTRUCTED IN ORBIT DUE TO ITS EXTREME SIZE. IN A FIT OF DECORUM THE ENGINEERS HAD FASHIONED IT AFTER A GOTHIC CATHEDRAL. I DO NOT REMEMBER IF I WAS AWED MORE BY THE INCREDIBLE SCALE OF THE STARSHIP OR BY THE DWINDLING PROPORTIONS OF THE PLANET BELOW.

§ AS OUR SHUTTLECRAFT PREPARED TO DOCK, I RECALL ERIC, SEATED BESIDE ME, POINTED OUT THE VARIOUS GEOGRAPHICS OF EARTH. AND I REMEMBER THINKING HOW SAD THIS WAS—IN A WAY. WE WERE NOW LOOKING UPON OUR HOMEWORLD FOR THE FINAL TIME. THE PLANET THAT WAS ONCE THE GARDEN, THE PLANET GOD HAD SENT HIS ONLY SON TO DIE UPON.

§ WE ARE VIRTUALLY ANGELS NOW FLYING THROUGH THE HEAVENS TO SPREAD HIS WORD. AND PERHAPS THIS IS WHERE MY MISGIVINGS STEM FROM.

§ HAVE WE BEEN DISEMBODIED? SEPARATED FROM OUR EARTHLY SHELLS? WE HAVE TAKEN ON THE PROPERTIES OF SPIRITS. CAN WE BE HUMAN ANY LONGER?

S. Marianna

You've cast your lot with Victor, haven't you? I would suspect you of being the instigator of the mutiny, but you are not that innovative.
Nonetheless, you've become intolerable. Your arrogance, imprudence and self-righteousness pale beside your treasonous actions. You've doomed us all, Joshua!
The status program now indicates that St. Catherines will remain in a decaying orbit around the object for thirty-two hours more. The lower region of the ship is strewn with corpses. The present count, sir, is twenty-six.
If we do not return this ship to order we shall follow them to oblivion. The mission is a total catastrophe, and that is your doing!
You are nothing more than a murderer, Joshua; the murderer of 215 people — all of us. I fear for you.
You've no hope of salvation. The silence of the devil condemns you. Forsaken by God, and forsaken by man, you'll stand in the inferno forever.

MAKE A LAST SUPREME GESTURE FOR THE CATHOLIC CHURCH, JOSHUA! DON'T BE A FOOL!
APERTURE SECURE
APERTURE RUPTURE
MEMBRANE ACTIVATED

THE SACRED AND THE PROFANE
concludes next issue